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EVIDENCES
OF THE
GENUINENESS OF THE GOSPELS.

VOLUME II.

THE
EVIDENCES
OF THE
GENUINENESS OF THE GOSPELS.

By ANDREWS NORTON.

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P R E F A C E

TO THE

SECOND AND THIRD VOLUMES.

THESE volumes principally contain a view of the evidence for the genuineness of the Gospels which is afforded by the early Gnostic heretics. Concerning the heretical Jewish Christians, the Ebionites, and their use of the Gospel of St. Matthew, little remains to be added to what has been said in the first volume. Among the Gentile Christians, there was, I believe, no other body of men besides the Gnostics who were generally regarded as heretics, before the close of the second century. It may, perhaps, be doubted, whether the Montanists should not be considered as forming an exception to this remark ; but whether they were or were not generally regarded as heretics before the period mentioned is unimportant to our present argument, since there is no doubt, that, in common with the catholic

Christians, they received the four Gospels as genuine; and their doctrines were so coincident with those of the catholic Christians, that no separate value attaches to their testimony. The evidence afforded by the Gnostics, therefore, is the main topic of inquiry in the present volumes.

In order to understand the nature and value of this evidence, it is necessary to be acquainted with the history and doctrines of the Gnostics, and the relation in which they stood to the catholic Christians. But this subject is one of very considerable difficulty. The Gnostics have hung like a dark cloud round the early history of Christianity. Such accounts have been given of them as to make their existence appear something strange and inexplicable. The obscurity thus spread over the early history of our religion has afforded opportunity for surmises and objections unfavorable to its truth. Whatever may tend to dispel it, and to let in a clearer light on the circumstances accompanying the reception of Christianity in the Gentile world, may tend equally to strengthen our assurance of the reality of what is recorded in the Gospels.

It may be added, that the doctrines of the Gnostics are connected with some of the most important facts in the history of opinions, and some of the

most remarkable phenomena in the operations of the human mind. In order to have a correct notion of these doctrines, we must view them in their relation to those circumstances, and to those tendencies of the mind, in which they had their origin. We are thus led to enter on a wide inquiry concerning topics whence our immediate subject receives illustration, and to which also it affords illustration in return. While studying in a proper manner the doctrines of the Gnostics, we are at the same time studying the character of ancient philosophy, and the tendencies of thought on the higher subjects of speculation.

Cambridge, 5 December, 1843.

NOTE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

To this edition I have added some passages which are printed separately for the use of those who own the first edition. There are no other important changes.

Cambridge, 20 April, 1848.

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PART III.

**ON THE EVIDENCE FOR THE GENUINENESS OF THE GOSPELS
AFFORDED BY THE EARLY HERETICS.**

PART III.



CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS. — THE EBIONITES. — THEIR USE
OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW ONLY. — INFERENCES FROM
THEIR NOT USING THE OTHER THREE GOSPELS.

WE now come to a subject, concerning which important errors have been committed, and which requires a more thorough examination than it has hitherto received. It is the manner in which the Gospels were regarded by the heretics of the first two centuries, particularly by the Gnostics.

Beside the great body of Christians, the *Catholic* Christians, as they may be denominated, conformably to the ancient use of the term, who were united, notwithstanding many diversities of opinion, in the general reception of a common system of faith, there were, at an early period, various sects called *Heresies*. The generality of the Heretics of the first two centuries may be divided into two prin-

cial classes, the Ebionites and the Gnostics ; and these two classes alone are of importance as furnishing evidence in regard to the genuineness of the Gospels.

OF the EBIONITES, the heretical Jewish Christians, I have formerly given some account,* in which I have anticipated nearly all that may be said concerning them in relation to the present subject. They were a sect that attracted but little notice from the earlier fathers ; whose accounts of them, however, are explicit and consistent. The discussions concerning them, in modern times, have been founded principally on the confused, contradictory, and obviously very inaccurate statements of Epiphanius, in the latter part of the fourth century. But all the ancient accounts of them agree, as we have formerly seen, in affirming that they used the Gospel of Matthew in its original language, with a text more or less pure. As has been remarked, this would not have been said of them, had they not said it of themselves. They comprehended, as appears, the generality of Jewish Christians, and were the successors and representatives of those

* Vol. I. pp. xlv. - lv. 2d Ed.

early converts in Judea, who were all "zealous for the law," and regarded with dislike or distrust the preaching of St. Paul.* There seems to have been but little intermixture among them of those Jews, the Hellenists, to whom, as living in foreign countries, the Greek language was often more familiar than that of their own nation. Thus, using the Gospel of Matthew, which was written in their native language, and, as there seems no doubt, with particular reference to Jewish Christians, they neglected the other Gospels. Their testimony, in receiving the Gospel of Matthew as his work, is blended with that of the common mass of Christians. Nor is it important to urge it any further; but it may be worth while, here as elsewhere, to keep in mind those considerations, formerly presented,† which show that the direct proof of the genuineness of any one of the Gospels is an indirect proof of the genuineness of all.

BUT there is another aspect in which this subject is to be viewed. The fact, that the Jewish Christians generally did not use the Gospels of Mark, Luke, and John, is to be con-

* Acts xxi. 20, 21.

† Vol. I. pp. 183 - 190, pp. 244, 245.

sidered in connection with the fact of the reception of those Gospels by the whole body of Gentile Christians. We have already taken notice of some of the inferences resulting from this consideration.* But the subject well deserves further attention.

Christianity had its origin among the Jews. From them it was communicated to the Gentiles, between whom and the Jews there had been previously a wide separation. This separation continued between the Jewish Christians, generally, and the Gentile Christians. With the exception of the Gospel of Matthew, the former did not use the Gospels received by the latter. It was not, therefore, from the main body of Jewish converts, that the Gentile Christians received the books, or to say the least, three of the books, which obtained universal reception among them, as genuine and authentic histories of Jesus. But these books did not have their origin among the Gentile Christians. They are evidently the works of Jewish writers.

From whom, then, and when, did the Gentile Christians receive them? There were preachers of the Gospel to the Gentiles, — like St. Paul and his associates, like Barnabas, the

* See Vol. I. p. 190, seqq. p. 82, seqq.

early friend of St. Paul, like Peter, who defended their cause before the assembled church at Jerusalem, like the companion of his travels, the Evangelist Mark, and like John, who spent the latter part of his life among them, — men enlightened by the spirit of God, who, in the first age of Christianity, communicated its great truths to the Gentiles, and called upon them to embrace it, teaching them that God had made no difference between them and the Jews as to a participation of its blessings. These early missionaries sent by God broke through the inveterate prejudices of their nation; they made an opening in the “partition-wall” which separated Gentiles from Jews; and from them, together with the religion itself, must the Gospels have been received by the Gentile Christians.

The prejudices which had been broken through by the Apostles and their associates quickly closed round the remaining body of Jewish Christians, who were very soon regarded as an heretical sect, under the name of Ebionites. After the apostolic age, there were no missionaries from their number for the conversion of the Gentile world.

St. John is supposed to have been the last survivor of that noble company of the first

preachers of Christ to the heathen world, through whom we who are not Jews by descent have received the blessings of our religion. Before his death the Jewish nation had been trampled to the earth. But the Gospels are unquestionably the work of Jewish authors. This being the state of the case, it is a supposition utterly incredible, that after the destruction of Jerusalem (A. D. 70) three writers should have risen up among the Jews, not Apostles nor associates of Apostles, but free from the narrow spirit of their nation, and zealous for the conversion of the Gentiles, who, to effect this object, composed three spurious Gospels under the names of Mark, Luke, and John. But the improbability does not stop here; for it must further be supposed that these three anonymous Jews put forward their Gospels, not only some time after the death of St. John, as well as of the other two pretended authors, but some time after the death of those who had known them familiarly; and still more, that those Jews, though they could not procure reception or countenance for their works among their own countrymen, succeeded effectually in deluding the whole body of Gentile Christians throughout the world,—though it must have been at a

pretty late period, that they undertook to accomplish this object.

Such, however, are the suppositions that must be resorted to, if it be denied that the Gospels were written by the authors to whom they are ascribed, and passed with the religion itself to the first converts from heathenism, sanctioned and certified by its earliest missionaries. The undisputed facts relating to the history of the Gospels, especially the fact that three of them were not used by the main body of Jewish Christians, make it evident that those books were received by the Gentile world through the channel of the first preachers of Christianity ; that they were received from Apostles and their associates.

CHAPTER II.

GENERAL ACCOUNT OF THE Gnostics. — STATE OF OPINION AMONG THE GREAT BODY OF CHRISTIANS DURING THE SECOND CENTURY.

WE here take leave of the Ebionites, and enter on a much more extensive and difficult subject. Our attention will now be confined to the Gnostics.

THE Greek word rendered *Gnostic* denoted, in its primary meaning, an enlightened man; and is commonly used by Clement of Alexandria to signify an enlightened Christian, a Christian philosopher.* In this sense, it was assumed as a designation by those heretics to whom the name is now restricted. The heretical Gnostics were divided into many particular sects; but there were striking characteristics common to them all, by which they were dis-

* This meaning survived the application of the word to the Gnostic heretics. In the *Lexicon* ascribed to Zonaras, who lived in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Γνωστικός (a "Gnostic") is defined to be "one perfectly conformed to the truth," ὁ τῇ ἀληθείᾳ ποιῶν τοὺς τελείως.

tinguished from the great body of Christians. Their religion was eclectic. While some of their contemporaries among the Heathens, of a similar cast of mind to their own, the later Platonists, were forming systems in opposition to and in rivalry of Christianity, they, on the contrary, incorporated into their theology the historical facts and some of the essential doctrines of our faith. In the systems thus composed by the Gnostics, foreign as they were from pure Christianity, the ministry of Christ held a very important place. It was the key-stone of their hypotheses.

Some of the leaders of the Gnostic sects appear to have been generally regarded in their day as men of more than common learning and ability; and their systems were so accordant with conceptions and habits of thinking which then prevailed, as to obtain a considerable degree of reputation and credence. Of the doctrines maintained by them it is necessary to our purpose to give some general account, which, in order that it may be at all satisfactory, or afford ground for a correct estimate of the character of those doctrines, will lead us to look beyond the Gnostics considered in themselves, and to view them in their relations to the state of things in which they existed.

By the generality of Christians they were regarded as adversaries, not as fellow-disciples; and they, in return, looked upon the many as unenlightened followers of Christ, who did not comprehend the essential character of his mission, were ignorant of the true God, whom he came to reveal, and mistook for that God, who had been before unknown, the inferior being who was the god of the Jews. With the exception of the Marcionites, they appear generally to have considered themselves as distinguished from all others, in their original conformation, by the peculiar possession of a spiritual principle, implanted in their nature, which was a constant source of divine illumination. Thus, in examining into the genuineness of the Gospels, the early Gnostics present themselves as an independent set of witnesses, widely separated, in their opinions and feelings, from the catholic Christians. Their doctrines were, at the same time, of such a character, as to seem, at first view, to admit of no reconciliation with the contents of the Gospels. "It was impossible," says Gibbon, "that the Gnostics could receive our present Gospels, many parts of which (particularly in the resurrection of Christ) are directly, and, as it might seem, designedly,

pointed against their favorite tenets."* If, notwithstanding this supposed impossibility, we should find that the Gnostics actually bear testimony to the genuineness of the Gospels, their evidence must clearly have a distinct and peculiar value.

It is true, that other sects, whose doctrines may appear to an intelligent Christian as irreconcilable with the contents of the Gospels as those of the Gnostics, have been zealous in asserting the claim of those books to the highest deference. But this has been done under very different circumstances. The systems of those sects have been slowly formed, during ages of ignorance and false reasoning; the true sense of the language of the Gospels has been gradually obliterated, and false meanings, derived from a barbarous theology, have been substituted in its place; the considerations necessary to be attended to, in order to understand the words of Jesus, have been disregarded, and thus, the key to their true explanation being lost or thrown away, modes of interpretation have been introduced, at once so irrational and

* Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Ch. xv. note 35. Vol. II. p. 286. 8vo. London. 1820.

so unsettled, that, by their application, the Scriptures may be made to speak any doctrine. Those systems, having no aid from reason, but being assailed by it on every side, have been obliged to rely, for their sole support, on the supposititious meanings assigned to the Scriptures; and thus, in the very act of falsifying the testimony of the books appealed to, it has become essential to maintain their credit. At the same time, the prevailing belief in the genuineness of the Gospels, not being the result of any investigation of the subject, had assumed the character of an inveterate and unassailable prejudice. But the case of the Gnostics was widely different. Their systems were in harmony with many of the philosophical speculations of their age, and relied for support upon doctrines already received, rather than upon the misinterpretation of the Scriptures. If they admitted the Gospels as genuine, they did not feel obliged, in consequence, to admit their authority as final; they appealed to other sources of religious knowledge, to their own reasonings, to oral tradition, — by which they pretended that the higher and esoteric doctrines of Jesus had been transmitted to them, — and to the divine light within, the privilege of their spiritual nature.

But it is particularly to be observed, that the earlier Gnostics lived at a time, when, if the Gospels be not genuine, the question respecting their credit and value must have been entirely open and unsettled ; that, upon the supposition of their not being genuine, they were works of the contemporaries of those Gnostics, or of individuals of the age immediately preceding ; and that their late origin, therefore, must have been so notorious, that no process of reasoning could have been required to make it evident that they were not genuine. But, in rejecting their authority on such indisputable ground, the Gnostics, instead of carrying on a doubtful and disadvantageous contest, would have gained a decisive triumph over their opponents by simply pointing out the fact, that the catholic system of faith, so far as it contradicted their own, was founded on writings pretending to an authority which they did not possess.

It follows from what has been said, that the nature and value of the evidence which the Gnostics afford for the genuineness of the Gospels cannot be understood and correctly estimated without some acquaintance with their history and doctrines. The subject is worthy of investigation, and I enter the more readily upon

the explanation of it, — such explanation as it may be in my power to give, — because it is not only necessary to my present purpose, but may also open to us new views of the history of opinions, and of the early history and of the evidences of our religion. It may be well, before proceeding farther, to advert to some of these bearings of the inquiry.

THE study of the history and doctrines of the Gnostics, connected as those doctrines were with the morals and philosophy of the age, and giving birth to controversies in which much of the character of the age is exhibited, may enlarge our views of the condition of the world, when Christianity was revealed ; and every accession to our knowledge concerning the intellectual and moral state of men in those times is adapted to strengthen our conviction of the divine origin of our religion.

In order to have a full conception of the evidences and value of Christianity, we must be informed of the state of the human character that existed at the time of its introduction, and with which it had to struggle. As our prospect widens and becomes more distinct, we may be reminded of the ancient doctrine of the East, that this world is the battle-field of the good

and evil spirits who divide the universe. The power of our religion will be perceived in the strength of the obstacles over which it triumphed. Its great truths, in their own nature intelligible as they are sublime, were then "dark with excessive bright." Men's minds were overwhelmed by their grandeur and novelty, and could not open to their full comprehension. In their colossal simplicity, they stood opposed to the baseless and visionary speculations which then passed for philosophy. The very plainness of their evidence, appealing only to the authority of God, as made evident by miraculous displays of his power, was in striking contrast with the reasoning of the age, resting on dreams, dealing with slippery words, and full of shallow subtilties. The morality of the Gospel, having for its object to free the individual from whatever may injure himself or others, and to teach him that his highest good consists in acting for the common good of all, presented itself in strange contrast with the unabashed selfishness, the loathsome sensuality, the rapacity, violence, and cruelty, which overspread society. This morality was, at the same time, very different from that magnificent but impracticable scheme which, though fully developed only by the Stoics, was presented in its chief lineaments by

all the higher philosophy of the age; the professed purpose of which was to aggrandize, and, as it were, deify its disciple, by raising him above all passion and suffering, to teach him, as the sum of duty, to bear and to forbear, and to place him in a state of stern, insulated quiet, unmoved by all around him. The first word which our religion addressed to men was "Reform." It came to re-create their characters, to change them in their own view from earthly to immortal beings, to call forth new affections, to supply new principles and aims, and to teach "the new doctrine of piety,"* making men feel what they had not before conceived of, their relations to God. By revealing Him, it came to annihilate the superstitions of the Heathen world, blended, as they were, with all its history, philosophy, eloquence, and poetry, forming an essential part of the machinery of government, entering into the daily habits of common life, and the source of those frequent festivals, games, and shows, which, barbarous and licentious as they often were, afforded to the many their most exciting pleasures. A principle was at work which could not have been of human origin; for it had to contend with all that ex-

* Τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον. 1 Tim. iii. 16.

isted on earth, except what might remain uncorrupted in the moral nature of man.

The strength of the errors that were to be overcome may be partially estimated by their continued operation to the present day, appearing in false doctrines, which were gradually introduced, and are now incorporated with the professed faith of most Christians; in modern systems of what is called philosophy, allied in thought and language to the mysticism of the later Platonists, and the pantheism of other ancient theologists; and in the influences of Pagan history and literature upon our taste and morals, in changing and debasing that standard of human excellence which Christianity would lead us to form.

Such being the state of the ancient world, the conceptions of our religion entertained by its early converts were not only imperfect, but were modified and discolored by the universal prevalence of error. These converts might change their hearts and lives, but they could not renovate their minds. They could not divest themselves of the whole character of their age, so as fully to comprehend the great truths they had been taught, in their proper bearing upon the conceptions and doctrines prevailing around them. They could not break up all their

previous associations of thought and feeling, originate new and rational systems of the highest philosophy, and pursue only those correct modes of reasoning, which, even at the present day, are but partially understood, and imperfectly applied to all subjects connected with our moral and intellectual nature. They could not at once do for themselves what many centuries have been slowly effecting for the wisest of modern times.

The causes which operated in common upon the Christian converts, to alloy the doctrines of our faith with the errors of the age, produced their most remarkable effects among the Gnostics. More visionary and more self-confident than the catholic Christians, they relied more on their philosophy, and less on the written records of our religion. Many of them, also, were among the mystics of those times, and trusted for guidance to their divine inward light. Hence, the Gnostics proceeded to extravagances, from which the catholic Christians kept aloof. But, in comparing together the distinctive opinions of the two parties, we shall find that their conceptions often approximated each other, and that, with essential differences of doctrine, there were, also, remarkable analogies and coincidences.

Thus, though the Gnostic doctrines were in stronger contrast with the truths of Christianity than the errors and misconceptions of the catholic Christians, yet, as they had ultimately the same origin or occasion, as they are to be traced alike to the false notions which had prevailed in the world, either among Heathens or Jews, their history may serve to bring out to view more distinctly the direct and indirect operation of some of those causes of error that enthralled the minds of the early catholic Christians; to make us apprehend more clearly, that there might be, and were, many conceptions of the wisest among them, which are not to be confounded with the doctrines of Christ; and to enable us to discern the real derivation of opinions that we might otherwise ascribe, as they have been ascribed, to traditionary explanations or to mere misconceptions of our faith. It is in a great measure by such investigations, that Christianity may be relieved from that apparent responsibility for what, in fact, are but the errors of its disciples, which, at the present day, is a principal obstacle to its reception.

It is true, that in the fundamental opinions of the early catholic Christians, as they appear in the writings of the most eminent of their number during the first three centuries, there

was nothing that essentially changed the character of our religion, or was adapted greatly to pervert its moral influence. But when we compare their writings with the New Testament, and remark the operation of the world around them on their sentiments and belief, we are, if I mistake not, irresistibly led to the conclusion, that the religion of Christ, the religion taught in the Gospels, did not come into being at any period subsequent to his time. Those who became its disciples after his death did not originate what they but imperfectly and erroneously apprehended. They were not the authors of doctrines or of books, of which they were, in many respects, but poor expositors.

Nor, it may be added, did Christianity have its origin in any wisdom of a preceding age. Distinguishable, as it is, from the opinions of its earlier converts respecting it, it stands far more widely separated from all that preceded it, either in the Jewish or Gentile world. There is nothing human to which its origin can be traced. When we understand the Gospels, and enter into their spirit;—when we consider their teachings respecting God, his inseparable relations to all his creatures, and his universal providence and love; their disclosures concerning man's immortality and the purposes of life,

our duties and our prospects ; their narrative, as consistent as it is wonderful, and their unparalleled portraiture of moral greatness in the character of Jesus ; — and when we observe that these histories are inartificial and imperfect, written in a rude style, clearly that of uneducated persons, so that their intrinsic character, even in this respect alone, precludes, as an incredible anomaly, the idea, that they were the result of literary skill, the study of philosophy, or any art of man, — it becomes evident that their existence cannot be explained by any thing known or felt on earth before the events which they record. It is a phenomenon marked by its dissimilitude from all around it, the unlikeness between the things of time and eternity, and, if I may so speak, between man and God.

As has been said, the religion of Christ is one thing, and the religion of the early Christians was another. But this renders it the more necessary, in order to estimate correctly the character of the early fathers, the early writers of eminence among the catholic Christians, that we should not forget the strong disturbing forces which acted upon their minds, to draw them from the sphere of Christian truth. They

labored under great disadvantages, from the universal ignorance of the Gentile world respecting many of the new subjects presented to their inquiry. On the one hand, they were biased by the inveterate errors of their age; and on the other, so far as those errors were connected with licentiousness of life, they were repelled by them to the opposite extreme of asceticism in speculation and practice,—an extreme to which, also, they were led by their hard circumstances, as members of a suffering and persecuted sect. To judge them fairly, we must be acquainted with the principles, conceptions, and modes of reasoning which characterized the philosophy of their times, and had modified all existing forms of thought, having been transmitted from the ancient philosophers, particularly Plato, with the whole weight of their authority. We must know what advances the human intellect had made, comprehend the influences under which their minds had been formed, and compare them, not with the most enlightened men of modern times, who have enjoyed advantages for the culture of the understanding which they never dreamed of, but with their predecessors and contemporaries. We must view them, like all other eminent men of ancient days, as figures in the age to which

they belong, and not bring them prominently forward, surrounded only by modern associations. If ignorant of the philosophy of their age, we have no standard by which to judge of their intellectual powers. Nay, we shall often misunderstand their meaning, and may direct our contempt or ridicule, not against what they have said, but against our own misconception of what they have said. Now, the doctrines of the Gnostics will show us what extravagances might be advanced by those who were reputed able and learned men in the times of which we speak; and such is the connection or identity of many opinions of the Gnostics with opinions that had before been held, or were appearing simultaneously in the writings of their contemporaries, that we cannot study their systems without being led to look beyond them to the philosophy of the age; and in doing so, we shall find that the Christian fathers suffer as little by a comparison with the Heathen philosophers, as with the Gnostic heretics. Such are some of the considerations incidentally presented to us in the inquiry on which we are now about to enter.

THE Gnostics may be separated into two great divisions; the MARCIONITES, on the one

hand, and the *THEOSOPHIC* GNOSTICS, as they may be called, on the other; this epithet being understood as referring to the imaginations of the latter respecting the Supreme God, and the spiritual world, as developed from him. Of the latter class the Valentinians are the principal representatives, as being the most considerable and numerous sect, and one the essential characteristics of which appear throughout the systems of other theosophic Gnostics. The fundamental doctrines held in common by the Valentinians and Marcionites were the following: — That the material world, the visible universe, was not the work of the Supreme Being, but of a far inferior agent, the Demiurgus, or the Creator,* who was also the god of the Jews; that the spiritual world, the Pleroma, as it was called, over which the true Divinity presided, and the material world, the realm of the Creator, were widely separated from each other; that evil was inherent in matter; that the material

* Δημιουργός, literally the "Workman." The term "Maker" might seem the preferable rendering, except that the associations with the word "Creator," when standing alone, correspond better with the conceptions of the Gnostics. But, in thus using the term "Creator," we must divest it of the idea of creation from nothing. There is no satisfactory evidence that any of the Gnostics rejected the then common philosophical notion of eternal, uncreated matter.

world, both as being material, and as being the work of an inferior being, was full of imperfection and evil; that the Saviour descended from the spiritual world, as a manifestation of the Supreme God, to reveal him to men, to reform the disorders here existing, and to deliver whatever is spiritual from the dominion of matter; and that the Supreme God had been unknown to men, to Jews and Heathens equally, before his manifestation of himself by Christ. In their view, he was the God of the New Testament, and the Creator was the god of the Old Testament. They at the same time conceived of the Creator as exercising a moral government over men, as dispensing rewards, and inflicting punishments. He, in their view, was "*Just.*" But the Supreme God did not punish. He was unmingled benevolence. He was "*Good.*"

In connection with these doctrines, neither the Valentinians nor the Marcionites supposed the Saviour to have had a proper human body of flesh and blood, in which corruption would have dwelt. The Valentinians, however, ascribed to him a real, though not a human body, while the Marcionites regarded his apparent body as a mere phantom. Those who maintained the latter opinion were called *Docetæ*, a name for which we may give an equivalent in

the word *Apparitionists*. But this name was also, sometimes, if not commonly, extended to all who denied that Christ had a proper human body ; and, thus used, comprehended the generality of the Gnostics.

In the systems of the Marcionites and Valentinians, the Creator appears as one. Other sects, it is said, believed the material world to have been formed by angels. But, among those angels, one was generally, perhaps universally, regarded as preëminent, and as the god of the Jews ; that is, as one to whom the name *Creator* may be distinctively applied. The Valentinians themselves sometimes spoke of the Creator as an angel, and associated with him, in the government of his works, other beings whom he had produced, giving them also the name of angels.

WHAT have been stated were the common doctrines of the Gnostics. Their fundamental distinction may be regarded as consisting in the belief, that the material universe was not formed by the Supreme Being, but by some inferior being or beings ; and that this being, or one of these beings, was the god of the Jews. In the writings of the earlier fathers against them, the stress of the controversy concerns this topic.

It was, as we might suppose, the great point at issue between them and the catholic Christians.

Thus Tertullian, in his work against Marcion, states it to be "the principal question" * between them; and the whole tenor of his arguments shows that it was so. The principal question, he says, in commencing his work, "whence the whole controversy arises, is, whether it be allowable to introduce two gods." †

* Advers. Marcion. Lib. I. c. 1. Opp. p. 366. Ed. Priorii.

† Or, "The principal, and hence the whole controversy, is of number: Whether it be allowable to introduce two gods." The passage referred to now stands thus: —

"Principalis itaque, exinde tota congressio, de numero: An duos deos liceat induci, si forte poetica, et pictoria licentia, et tertia jam heretica. Sed veritas Christiana districtè prenuntiavit: Deus, si non unus est, non est." Advers. Marcion. Lib. I. c. 3. p. 366.

Perhaps it should be read thus: —

"Principalis ita *questio*, et inde tota congressio, de numero, An duos deos liceat induci. Sit forte poetica, et pictoria licentia, et tertia jam heretica; sed veritas Christiana," &c.

That *questio* has been lost from the text, and that *principalis* was used by Tertullian as an epithet to that word, and not to *congressio*, may appear not only from the somewhat incoherent meaning resulting from its present connection with *congressio*, but also from the last sentence of the first section. "Nam quatenus admittenda congressio est, . . . regulam adversarii prius prætexam, ne cui lateat in qua *principalis questio* dimicatura est."

Then follow the words, "Duos Ponticus [Marcion] deos affert"; and after a few comments on this doctrine, Tertullian proceeds, as before quoted, "Principalis itaque, exinde tota congressio"; or "Principalis ita *questio*, et inde tota congressio."

The main object of his work is to prove from reason, from the Old Testament, from the Gospels, and from the Epistles, that the Supreme Being, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the same being with the Creator of the material universe, and the God of the Jews.

Irenæus is our great authority concerning the theosophic Gnostics, of whom alone he treats, to the exclusion of Marcion and his followers, for a reason to be hereafter mentioned. In the introduction to his work, he assigns, as the cause of his undertaking to write against the heretics, that they “overturn the faith of many, leading them away, by a pretence of superior knowledge, from Him who framed and ordered the universe, as if they had something higher and better to show them than the God who made heaven and earth, and all that is therein ; bringing ruin upon their converts, by giving them injurious and irreligious sentiments toward the Creator.” * In the first book of his work, he gives an account of the opinions of the Gnostics. In his second book, he undertakes to confute them, by showing their intrinsic incredibility, and commences by saying : — “ It will be proper to begin with the first and principal

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. I. Præf. § 1. p. 2. Ed. Massuet.

topic, God, the Creator, whom they blaspheme, who is God and Lord alone, sole author of all, sole Father." * In concluding the book, he affirms that what he has been maintaining is consonant to what was taught by Christ and his apostles, by the Law and the Prophets, namely, that there is one God and Father of All, and that all things were made by him, and not by angels, nor by any other Power. † He then begins his third book by proving this doctrine from the Gospels, which, he says, all teach "that there is one God, the Maker of heaven and earth, who was announced by the Prophets, and one Messiah, the Son of God." ‡ In the last paragraph of this book, he prays that the heretics may not persevere in their errors, but that, being "converted to the church of God, Christ may be formed within them; and that they may know the Maker of this universe, the only true God and Lord of all." "Thus we pray for them," he says, "loving them better than they love themselves." He then states, that in his next book he shall endeavour to induce them, by reasoning from the words of Christ, "to abstain from speaking evil of their Maker, who

* Lib. II. c. 1. § 1. p. 116.

† Lib. II. c. 35. § 4. p. 171.

‡ Lib. III. c. 1. § 2. p. 174.

alone is God"; and, accordingly, in the commencement of the fourth book, he repeats similar representations of their fundamental doctrine, which, with others to the same effect, it is unnecessary to subjoin.

"I will endeavour," says Origen,* "to define who is a heretic. All who profess to believe in Christ, and yet affirm that there is one god of the Law and the Prophets, and another of the Gospels, and maintain that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ was not He who was proclaimed by the Law and the Prophets, but another, I know not what, God, wholly unknown and unheard of, — all such we consider as heretics, however they may set off their doctrines with different fictions. Such are the followers of Marcion, and Valentinus, and Basilides."†

In the fifth century, Theodoret wrote a history of heresies. He speaks of the Gnostics as nearly extinct, and professes that his accounts of them are derived from preceding writers.‡

* Apud Pamphili Mart. Apolog. pro Origene; in Origen. Opp. IV. Append. p. 22.

† The original adds, — "and those who call themselves Tethians"; where, for "Tethians," I suppose we should read "Sethians," a name assumed by some of the Gnostics, who regarded Seth as the progenitor or prototype of the *spiritual* among men.

‡ See the Introduction to his "Hæreticarum Fabularum Com-

He treats of them in his first book ; and this book, he says, contains "an account of the fables of those who have imagined another Creator, and, denying that there is one principle of all things, have introduced other principles which have no existence ; and who say that the Lord appeared to men in the semblance of a man only." *

OUR information concerning the distinguishing doctrines common to the Gnostics, in the general form in which they have been stated, is full and satisfactory ; and these doctrines there is no difficulty in comprehending. But the same cannot be said of the transcendental speculations of the theosophic Gnostics. These concerned the supposed production from the Supreme Divinity of hypostatized † attributes and *ideas*, forming beings whom, in common with him, they denominated Æons, or Immortals ; — the full development of the Deity by those emanations, constituting the Pleroma ; ‡ — the

pendium," and the Preface to the Second Book. Opp. IV. pp. 187 – 189, 218. Ed. Sirmond.

* Ibid. p. 188.

† I use the term "hypostatize," and its relatives, to express the ascribing of proper personality to what in its nature is devoid of it.

‡ Πλήρωμα, *Fulness, Completeness, Perfection*, here signifying

realm of God, the Spiritual World (in contradistinction to the *animal* and material), which was likewise called the Pleroma ; all properly spiritual existences being considered as deriving their substance from that of the Infinite Spirit ; — and the mingling of spirit with matter ; the causes which led to the formation of the material world, and the relations of this to the spiritual world.

These speculations of the theosophic Gnostics were very foreign from any conceptions with which we are familiar. They seem to have assumed no definite and permanent shape, but to have varied according to the imaginations of different sects and individuals ; every one, as Tertullian says, moulding what he had received to his own liking ; the disciple thinking himself as much at liberty as his master to innovate at pleasure.* Nearly all the direct information

the full, complete, perfect development of the Deity. The word, though with a change of its meaning, was borrowed by the Gnostics from St. Paul. See Ephesians i. 23 ; iii. 19. Coloss. i. 19 ; ii. 9.

* Tertullian. *De Præscript. Hæretic.* c. 42. pp. 217, 218. — Of the sect of the Marcosians Irenæus treats at much length, probably because they prevailed particularly in the part of Gaul where he resided. (*Lib. I. c. 13. § 7. p. 65.*) He concludes his account of them with saying, — “ But, since they disagree among themselves in doctrine and teaching, and those who are acknowledged as the more recent affect every day to find out something

concerning them, on which we can rely with any confidence, is derived from their earlier controversial opponents, the fathers of the second and third centuries ; and it cannot be supposed that those writers furnish a full explanation of the theories of the Gnostics in their most intelligible and plausible form. It was the business of the fathers to divest them of all adventitious recommendations, to remove whatever might dazzle and deceive the eye, and to show, not their coincidence with any existing forms of philosophy, but their essential errors, their intrinsic incongruity, and their opposition to reason and Scripture. They have taken them to pieces, to exhibit their defects ; and it is not easy, or rather it is impossible, to restore them as they were originally put together. At the same time, clearness of thought, precision of language, and accuracy in reporting opinions, were not characteristics of the writers of that age. Beside this, the Gnostics did not understand themselves, and it was impossible, therefore, that the fathers should understand them.

new, and to bring forth what never had been thought of before, it is hard to describe the notions of all of them." (Lib. I. c. 21. § 5. p. 98.) The same, or nearly the same, might, I conceive, have been said of every other body of theosophic Gnostics, who were classed together as a sect.

All these causes combine to occasion peculiar difficulty in forming a just notion of the speculations of the theosophic Gnostics. If their own writings had remained to us entire, no common acuteness would probably have been necessary to follow the process by which visionary conceptions and allegories passed into doctrines; to apprehend the state of mind, the confused mingling of imperfect, changing, and inconsistent fancies, out of which their theories arose; to determine where mysticism was brightening into meaning; or to detect what portion of truth, under some disguise or other, may have entered into and been neutralized in their composition. As in so many metaphysical and theological systems, from the age of Plato to our own, we should doubtless have found, that their dialect admitted of but a very partial translation into the universal language of common sense. With the best guidance, we should have been unable to place ourselves in the same position with the Gnostics, under the same circumstances, so as to discern the spectral illusions which, in the dawn of Christianity, they saw pictured on the clouds, and fancied to be celestial visions.

Still, even as regards their theosophic doctrines, enough may be ascertained for our purpose; perhaps all that is of importance in rela-

tion to the history of opinions, or the history of our religion. After fixing our attention on them steadily, what appeared at first view altogether confused and monstrous begins to assume a form better defined ; the great features common to their systems show themselves more distinctly, and we are able to discern their likeness to other modes of opinion that have widely prevailed.

The extramundane speculations of the Gnostics have attracted particular attention, both from their very nature, and from the subtile and curious inquiries to which they have led, in attempts to disengage their meaning and trace their relations. They present difficult, though many of them unimportant, problems, of which some may be solved by research and acuteness ; and they exhibit the human mind in one of its most extraordinary aspects. To these speculations, also, as at once the strangest and most indefensible part of the doctrines of their opponents, the attention of the fathers was particularly directed. From these causes, they have been put too prominently forward in modern accounts of the Gnostic doctrines, and the reader has been bewildered and confused among very obscure and very uncertain details. Coming unacquainted to the subject, he has found himself at once presented with a phantasmagoria of strange

shapes, of which he could not discern the relations or significance. Attention should be first directed to the distinctive and striking characteristics common to the Gnostics, and then to the leading ideas involved in the speculations of the theosophic Gnostics. In pursuing the inquiry further, whatever discoveries some have fancied themselves to make, we find, in truth, little information that can be confidently relied on, and few facts of any real interest.

THE fathers, as has been said, were but poor interpreters of the dreams of the theosophic Gnostics. But as regards the whole history of the Gnostics, there is constant need of caution in admitting, and care in scrutinizing, the representations of their catholic opponents. What is related by the fathers concerning supposed heretics *of the first century* is mixed with fables and improbabilities. Their fuller accounts of the more important sects of the second century, the Marcionites and Valentinians, were founded upon their writings. But there are other cases, in which it admits of no doubt, that even those of the fathers who are our best authorities proceeded upon common rumor and oral information, distorted, exaggerated, and unfounded. The conceptions of the Gnostics were, many of

them, of such a character, that it was hardly possible that they should be verbally stated by an unfriendly reporter, without, at least, unintentional misrepresentation. The limits of different sects were undefined, and so also were those which separated the whole body of Christian Gnostics from individuals beyond the outskirts of Christianity, with whom they were confounded. The members of a sect were held together by no creed ; their opinions on all but the essential doctrines of Gnosticism were unfixed and changing ; and some of the speculations of the leading theosophists, it is evident, must have been little adapted to the capacity of the greater number of their professed followers, and very liable to be misunderstood and perverted, even by them.

It often requires much acuteness and discrimination, as well as intellectual and moral fairness, to give a correct report of the system of an individual or a sect, especially when its doctrines, being involved in mysticism, present no definite ideas, even to the minds of those by whom they are held. Some of the ancient philosophers, particularly Plato, could they have had a foreknowledge of the works of their admirers and expositors, in ancient and modern times, would, I believe, have wondered greatly at much

which they could, and much which they could not, understand. But the fathers did not write of the Gnostics as admiring historians. With the partial exception of Clement of Alexandria, they wrote as controvertists, whose feelings were enlisted against them. All the errors, but such as spring from intentional dishonesty, to which such controvertists are liable, are to be expected, even from those of their number on whom alone we can rely, the fathers of the first three centuries, or the *earlier* fathers as they may be called, by way of specific distinction. Under circumstances which furnish much less excuse, the grossest mistakes are not unfrequently committed. Thus, a German theologian of our day classes Priestley among decided atheists ; * and another, a naturalist himself, states that Locke agreed with Spinoza, Hobbes, and Hume, in believing reputed miracles to be only natural events, referring in evidence of his assertion to a tract by which it is clearly disproved. † A still more remarkable error concerning that great man is the statement, or implication, to be found, I believe, in some writers above the low-

* Lehrbuch des christlichen Glaubens, von August Hahn. (Leipzig, 1828.) p. 178.

† Institutiones Theologiæ Christianæ Dogmaticæ a I. A. L. Wegscheider. § 48. not. a. p. 111. ed. 2da.

est class, that he referred the origin of all our ideas to sensation. Many similar misrepresentations might be produced ; and from such errors, committed, as it were, before our eyes, through the neglect or misuse of means of information open to all, we learn what may have been the errors of ancient writers, at a period when it was incomparably more difficult to ascertain the truth ; when all communication of knowledge from a distance was tardy and imperfect ; when oral accounts, with the misunderstandings and misrepresentations by which they are usually characterized, were often the only source of information attainable ; and when the voice of the press, which now makes itself heard on every side, to confirm truth, or to confute error, in regard to all facts that are anywhere of common notoriety, was as yet unuttered.

Thus, as reporters of the history and doctrines of the Gnostics, in their obscurer ramifications, even the earlier fathers were in a great measure disqualified, not merely by their feelings of dislike toward those heretics, but by the great difficulty of obtaining full and correct knowledge concerning them ; and, we may add, by that want of accuracy of conception and representation, which they shared in common with their opponents, and with all others of their age.

We must, furthermore, keep in view their prejudices, and their liability to mistake, not merely as respects the doctrines, but also as respects the character and morals of the Gnostics. We may readily believe, that vices, which were more properly to be ascribed to the depravity of individuals, were sometimes brought as general charges against the whole body to which those individuals were considered as belonging, and that the practical inferences unfavorable to morality, to be drawn from the false doctrines of the Gnostics, were represented as their common practical effects; though it is often the case, that men do not follow out in action the results of bad principles any more than of good.

In determining the truth concerning the Gnostics, we may find a concurrence of credible and contemporary testimony to what is probable in itself, and coincident or consistent with the still remaining expositions which they themselves gave of their doctrines; and consistent, also, with forms of opinion prevailing during the period when they sprung up and flourished. This testimony, so confirmed, is sufficient to establish the leading facts concerning their character and doctrines. In proceeding farther, we must judge of the accounts given of them from the particular probabilities that each case may present,

and especially from the consistency of those accounts with the truths concerning them which we have found means to settle. And, throughout this whole inquiry, particular attention must be given to the very different value of those ancient writers who have treated of the Gnostics, to the period when they lived, to their means of information, to the temper and purpose with which they wrote, and to their respective characters for correctness and truth. In this respect, as we shall hereafter see, a wide distinction is to be made among writers who have often been indiscriminately quoted, as of equal authority in regard to the history of the Gnostics.

THIS subject has afforded scope for an abundance of hypotheses in modern times ; for few facts have been so well established, and so generally acknowledged, as to stand in their way. It has been a sort of disputed province between fiction and history. We may meet, on every side, with statements respecting the Gnostics altogether unfounded. Gibbon says, that they "were distinguished as the most learned, the most polite, and most wealthy of the Christian name";* but the assertion is made without

* Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Ch. xv. Vol. II. p. 285.

proof, on his own responsibility ; unless, indeed, he has repeated or exaggerated the error of some preceding modern writer, of which I am not aware. The representation is such as it may readily be supposed was not derived from their ancient controversial opponents, who alone can be referred to for information concerning the subject. No one, I think, besides Gibbon, has ascribed to them the worldly distinctions of superior refinement and wealth ; but the zeal for paradoxes, which prevails among many of the theological writers of our age, has shown itself in other representations. The theosophic Gnostics, though their speculations are among the most vague and inconsequent that any visionaries have produced, have been transformed into penetrating and refined philosophers, or rather, described as “equally versed in the mysteries of Platonism, of the Cabbala, of the Zend-Avesta, and of the New Testament ; as belonging rather to the world of ideas than to that of sensations, and as manifesting the human soul in its sublime ecstasies.”* This is the language of a writer who does not separate himself from the rest of the intellectual

* Matter, *Histoire Critique du Gnosticisme*. (1828.) Tom. II. p. 281.

world by his general tone of thought and expression, or by any radical changes in the use of language. But one of the followers of the latest, darkest, and most repulsive school of German metaphysicians has likewise thought to do honor to the Gnostics by claiming them as its progenitors.*

* I refer to Baur, Professor of Gospel Theology in the University of Tübingen, a disciple of Hegel, and a writer of much note among his countrymen, who has published a large work relating to the Gnostics, entitled "The Christian Gnosis (or Gnosticism); or the Christian Philosophy of Religion historically developed." (Tübingen. 8vo. 1835.) His main purpose is to represent the Gnostics as the true religious philosophers of their times, and to exhibit the resemblance of their doctrines to the latest philosophy of religion, as developed by Jacob Boehmen, Schelling, Schleiermacher, and finally by Hegel, who has brought it nearest to perfection. The fundamental doctrine, in which he regards the Gnostics as coinciding with these modern philosophers, is one which he has arbitrarily ascribed to them. According to him, they viewed God (their Supreme God) as an unconscious, impersonal, and unintelligent being. The doctrine of Hegel teaches that all individual spirits are but modifications of one universal spirit, the only positive existence in the universe. Ideas alone are things. But this universal spirit is, in itself, unconscious, and first arrives at consciousness in its development in man. Man is the only conscious God. "The essence of religion, therefore, is the self-consciousness of God. God knows himself in a consciousness different from him, which, in itself, is the consciousness of God, but which also has reference to itself, as it knows its identity with God; an identity existing through the negation of finiteness. Thus, in one word, God is this, — to distinguish one's self from one's self, to become objective to

To justify such eulogies as have been bestowed on them by the writer first mentioned, their systems are professedly laid open; and

one's self, but, in this distinction, to be absolutely identical with one's self." These words, in which Baur reports the doctrine of Hegel on the most important of subjects, seem rather the language of a man not of sane mind, than such as accords with the character of one reputed, by many of his countrymen, to be the wisest of philosophers. I subjoin them in the original.

"Der Inhalt der Religion ist daher das Selbstbewußtseyn Gottes. Gott weiß sich in einem von ihm verschiedenen Bewußtseyn, das an sich das Bewußtseyn Gottes ist, aber auch für sich, indem es seine Identität mit Gott weiß, eine Identität, die vermittelt ist, durch die Negation der Endlichkeit. Gott ist also mit Einem Worte dieß: sich von sich zu unterscheiden, sich Gegenstand zu seyn, aber in diesem Unterschiede schlechthin mit sich identisch zu seyn." (Baur, pp. 674, 675.)

After this account of "The Christian Philosophy of Religion," which, it appears, is atheism, Baur remarks, that it is evident "how intimately this philosophy is connected with Christianity, how eagerly it transfers to itself its entire substance, nay, that, in its whole purpose, it is nothing else than a scientific explanation of the problem of historical Christianity." (pp. 709, 710.)

In the work of Baur, there is no critical examination of the history of the Gnostics, nor any information of value concerning them. He ascribes to them, not only without authority, but contrary to all evidence, the doctrine of an unconscious and impersonal God. His work, like those of many of his countrymen, exhibits an incapacity of thinking clearly and consistently, and of presenting a lucid and well-digested exposition of a subject; and is characterized by such a use of words, especially concerning the topics of religion, as would unsettle all their established meanings. It belongs to that class of speculative writings, of which Germany has been so fertile, treating of the most important subjects, and promulgating, sometimes with dogmatical

though the end be not obtained, though nothing wonderful appear, yet the Gnostics, could they revive, might address their expositors in words like those which Plato puts into the

phlegm, and sometimes with heartless flippancy, doctrines the most disastrous to faith and morals. These writings are distinguished, not so much by a want of reasoning, or an evident incapacity of reasoning, as by an apparent insensibility to its necessity or use. Every thing is assumed. The most extravagant and most pernicious theories are put forward, as if they consisted of self-evident propositions. Yet, when the metaphysician or theologian of the day brings out his new system, resting on no truths or facts, but spun from his own brain, his disciples (*les plus sots qui toujours admirent un sot*) applaud the rigid thought and profound speculations of their master; while more intelligent readers, unaccustomed to this style of discussion without explanation or argument, are at first perplexed by a phenomenon which they cannot readily understand. These works, numerous as they are, do not belong to the literature of the world. They form a literature, if it may be so called, immiscible with any other. The speculations they contain have no alliance with those truths which human wisdom has established, or which God has revealed to us. Tennemann, the German historian of philosophy, likened the new school of German metaphysicians, as it existed in his time, to the later Platonists. Baur finds a strong resemblance between those of our day and the Gnostics. These modern metaphysicians do, in truth, belong to the age of the later Platonists and Gnostics. But they resemble them not so much through a correspondence of doctrines, as in their mystical and barbarous obscurity, in their perversion and fabrication of language, in their arrogant claims, in their contempt for the exercise of the understanding in the investigation and establishment of truth, and in their pretending to some other foundation than reason and the revelation of God on which to rest our highest knowledge.

mouth of Theætetus, after subjecting him to the questioning of Socrates : — “ By Jupiter, you have made me say more than I had in me.” Nor has this too great ingenuity of explanation been confined to those who have formed an over-estimate of the spiritual acquirements of the Gnostics. In the development of their opinions, it is not uncommon to find a striking contrast between the scanty or worthless materials that antiquity has left us, and the long and ready detail of a modern expositor, defining the particulars, and tracing the history, of a system. When we look for the proof of what is affirmed, we find, perhaps, straggling authorities of doubtful credit or uncertain application ; supposed analogies with opinions less understood than those of the Gnostics, to establish which, the mere shadows of meaning are to be tracked through the obscurity of Eastern theology, or some imaginary scheme of Egyptian superstition ; etymological conjectures ; and explanations of allegories and symbols, to which the ingenuity of the writer may give a glimmering of probability, while his page is open before us. In the words of Tertullian, *late quærentur incerta, latius disputantur præsumpta* ; “ there is a wide search after uncertainties, and a wider discussion of assumptions.” At the same time,

facts that lie most open to view have been disregarded, or misrepresented, or but partially stated.

In consequence, however, of all the attention which has been given to the subject, the character of the Gnostics may undoubtedly at the present day be better understood than it has been. The extravagant over-estimate of them, which appears in some modern writers, is, in part, a reaction produced by the extravagant depreciation of them which preceded it. The crude accounts of the later as well as earlier fathers were formerly received without discrimination, and without any attempt to disengage the truth from the language of controversy, or from the mass of falsehood in which it was enveloped, and consequently without any exercise of judgment on the respective credibility of the authorities adduced. The charges made against them by the later as well as earlier fathers, whether probable or not, have been repeated without examination by theological bigotry, which, connecting with the name of heretic the ideas of folly, immorality, and impiety, has given itself full scope in ascribing these bad qualities to the Gnostics. Even more sober and judicious writers have spoken of their systems as if they had just appeared, instead of having

been produced many centuries ago; and have rather compared them with an abstract standard of what they themselves deemed sound philosophy, than viewed them relatively to the erroneous conceptions of ancient times. Their proper rank has not been assigned them among the other forms of metaphysical and religious belief, equally false and irrational, which have been, or still are, extensively received. But the Gnostics were prodigies neither of wisdom nor of folly. There was nothing peculiar in the character of their minds to distinguish them from numerous theorists of their own and other times. With the exception of the Marcionites, they belonged to the large class of the professors of hidden but intuitive wisdom, who exhibit to the ignorant bits of colored glass, with the air of men displaying inestimable jewels. The most eminent among them were probably far inferior to some of their opponents, to such men as Tertullian and Origen, in vigor and clearness of intellect, and in that intense conviction of the truths of religion which at once implies a sound judgment and tends to perfect it; but I do not know that they would appear to much disadvantage, if brought into comparison with the later Platonists of the third and fourth centuries.*

* Tertullian commences his treatise "Against the Valentini-

THE Gnostics and Ebionites, as has been remarked, were the principal heretics of the first two centuries. They were both divided from the communion of catholic Christians. The Ebionites, belonging to what, in their view, was

ans " with a remarkable passage, which, though of some length, it may be worth while to quote. It forms an amusing contrast with that before given from a modern author (p. 44), and is, I doubt not, somewhat less distant from the truth. The representation of Tertullian carries with it a degree of intrinsic probability, whatever allowance is to be made for the roughness of his language. He says : —

"The Valentinians, who are the most numerous body among the heretics, because they consist, in great part, of apostates, and are given to fables, and in fear of no discipline, care about nothing more than to conceal what they teach, if men can be said to teach what they conceal. Secrecy is made a matter of conscience. Confusion is taught under the name of religion. In those Eleusinian mysteries, which are a branch of the Attic superstition, what is kept secret is shameful. So the access is made difficult, the initiation is long, a seal is put on the lips ; a discipline of five years is required, that suspense may build up a high opinion of what is to be known, and its grandeur, when revealed, may appear proportional to the curiosity excited. Then follows the obligation of silence. What has been so tardily attained must be carefully guarded. Yet, after all the longings of the initiated, after the sealing of their lips, the whole divinity revealed in the sanctuary is an obscene image. But an allegory, holding forth the venerable name of Nature, is forced to sanction the figure ; obscuring the sacrilege, and excusing the infamy by false similitudes. In like manner, the heretics of whom we speak, dressing up the idlest and vilest fictions with holy names, and titles, and arguments, drawn from true religion, — the divine love and abundance [the abundance in the Scriptures] affording ready opportunity,

the privileged race of the Jews, kept aloof from the Gentile converts ; and, among the Gnostics, the Marcionites formed separate churches of their own.* The theosophic Gnostics, it is probable, likewise had their separate religious assemblies, unless they were prevented by the smallness of their numbers, or by what they re-

since, from much, much may be cut away, — have, for a lure, made Eleusinian mysteries of their own, sacred only as buried in silence, celestial through taciturnity alone. If you inquire of them in good faith, they compose their countenances, and raise their eyebrows, and say, ‘ It is a high matter.’ If you question them subtly, they prevaricate and assert the common faith in ambiguous language. If you show that you understand them, they deny their doctrines. If you come to close conflict, they put on an appearance of foolish simplicity when defeated. They do not commit themselves to their own disciples before they have secured them. They have the art of persuading before they teach. But truth persuades by teaching ; it does not teach by persuasion.

“ So we are regarded as simple by them, simple only, not wise ; as if wisdom must be disjoined from simplicity, the Lord having united them.”

The text of this passage of Tertullian appears to be best given in Le Prieur’s edition (p. 250). But, as regards a few words to which I cannot assign a probable meaning, I have rendered them, as perhaps they may be amended by conjecture, thus : —

“ Sed naturæ venerandum nomen allegorica dispositio prætendens, patrocini coactæ [*f. coactæ*] figuræ, sacrilegium obscurat, et convicium falsi [*f. falsis*] simulacris exornat.”

“ — facili charitati ex [*f. charitatis et*] divinæ copiæ occasione, quia de multis multa succedere est [*f. succidere vel succedere*] : *conject. Rigalt.*.”

* Tertullian. *Advers. Marcion.* Lib. IV. c. 5. pp. 415, 416.

garded as a philosophical indifference to outward forms of religion. Tertullian, however, says generally of the heretics, that, "for the most part, they have no churches; motherless, without a settled habitation, bereaved of faith, outcasts, they wander about without a home." * An open separation between the Gnostics and the catholic Christians was produced, on the one hand, by the pride of the Gnostics in their peculiar opinions, and by their regarding themselves as the only spiritual believers, and all beside as lying in darkness; and, on the other hand, by the strong dislike which the great body of Christians entertained for their doctrines and pretensions, and by the brief profession of faith (the origin of what was afterward called "The Apostles' Creed") required of a catechumen, after passing his noviciate, before admission to the communion. The Gnostics, however, sometimes represented their exclusion from the church as unjust. Irenæus says of the Valentinians:—"For the sake of making converts of those of the church, they address discourses to the multitude, by which they delude and entice the more simple, imitating our modes of expression to induce them to become more frequent hearers, and

* De Præscript. Hæretic. c. 42. p. 218.

complaining to them of us, that, when they think as we do, say the same things and hold the same doctrine, we abstain without reason from their communion, and call them heretics." * Till toward the middle of the third century, when *the* heretics were spoken of in general terms, the Gnostics alone were for the most part intended. Thus, for example, Clement of Alexandria sets forth his design to "show to all the heretics, that there is one God and Lord omnipotent clearly proclaimed by the Law and the Prophets, in connection with the blessed Gospel"; † a proposition requiring to be proved only against the Gnostics. So also Irenæus, in the Preface to his fourth book, disregarding his own previous mention of the Ebionites, speaks of all heretics as "teaching blasphemy against our Maker and Preserver." ‡

BUT, in considering the subject of the early heretics, it is to be remarked, that among the catholic Christians, their contemporaries, there was great freedom of speculation, and great diversity of opinion, till after the time of Origen. Probably no standard of orthodoxy was gener-

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. III. c. 15. § 2. p. 203.

† Stromat. IV. § 1. p. 564. Ed. Potter.

‡ Cont. Hæres. Lib. IV. Præf. § 4. p. 228.

ally received, much more comprehensive than what has been called the Apostles' Creed ; and the opinions of no individual writer were conformable to any of the standards which have been since established. In comparing Tertullian with Origen, the one the most eminent defender of the common faith among the Greeks, and the other among the Latins, and both, after their death, reputed as heretics, we not only find in them a wholly different cast of mind and temper, but the speculations of the one are in many respects diverse from, and opposite to, those of the other ; while those of each of them are often very remote from what is the general belief of Christians at the present day. The author of the Clementine Homilies seems, in ancient times, to have escaped the imputation of being a heretic ; yet, among other doctrines widely different from the more common faith, he brought forward a theory, to be elsewhere noticed, respecting the Jewish Law and the Old Testament, in opposition to the Gnostics, which approached little nearer than their own to the opinions afterwards established. Tertullian wrote warmly against Hermogenes, who maintained that evil had its source in eternal, unoriginated matter. Yet Hermogenes does not appear to have been separate from the communion

of the catholic church; and probably not a few other catholic Christians held, in common with him, a doctrine so prevalent in pagan philosophy. It may be observed, that Hermogenes gave his name to no sect, which seems to show that there was nothing extraordinary in his opinions being held by a Christian. Tertullian also wrote against Praxeas, who opposed the speculations which had been introduced concerning the proper personality of the Logos. His zeal was inflamed by the circumstance, that Praxeas had been an opponent of the Montanists, of which sect Tertullian had become a member. But he tells us, that the greater part of Christians, "the simple, not to say the unwise and ignorant," favored the opinions of Praxeas.* And, to mention but one other example, there is no ground for supposing that Tertullian himself, after becoming a Montanist, was rejected from the communion of the catholic church; though it is true that the Montanists were soon regarded as a heresy separated from it.

The state of Christians, then, during the second century, presents a very remarkable appearance. By the side of the great body of Gentile Christians, among whom such freedom of spec-

* *Advers. Praxeam*, c. 3. p. 502.

ulation prevailed, we find another smaller body of Gentile Christians, the Gnostics, agreeing with the former in acknowledging Christ as a divine teacher, but separated from them by an impassable gulf, as holding doctrines which rendered the amalgamation of the two parties impossible. Notwithstanding some striking analogies between their speculations, there was no gradual transition from one system to the other. The separation was abrupt and broad. It consisted in the fundamental doctrine of the Gnostics, that the Creator, or the principal Creator, of the universe, the god of the Jews, was not the Supreme Divinity and the God of Christians.

THE scheme of the Gnostics is, without doubt, to be regarded, in part, as a crude attempt to solve the existence of evil in the world, a subject which engaged their attention in common with that of other religious theorists of their age. But the desire to solve this problem was not, I conceive, the principal occasion of the existence of Gnosticism. This, I think, is to be found in the hereditary aversion of Gentiles to Judaism; in the traditionary views of the Old Testament, communicated by the Jews from whom it was received; and in the impossibility which the Gnostics found of reconciling the con-

ceptions of God that it presents, with their moral feelings, and with those conceptions of him which they had derived from Christianity. Nor, in this respect, did they stand alone. A large portion, we know not how large, of the catholic Christians, including some of the most eminent and intellectual of their number, equally regarded much in the Jewish Law and history as irreconcilable with correct morality and just notions of God, if understood in its obvious sense. They, however, as we shall hereafter see, took a very different course from that of the Gnostics, in escaping from the difficulty with which they were pressed.

Regarding the aversion of the Gentiles to Judaism as the principal occasion of Gnosticism, we may readily understand why the whole body of early heretics among the Gentile converts became Gnostics. As soon as men's attention was distinctly fixed upon the subject, nothing but a thorough and strongly operative faith in Christianity could enable a Gentile Christian to subdue the prejudices, and overcome the difficulties, which stood in the way of his acknowledging the Old Testament to have the divine authority that was claimed for it.

To the opinions of the Gnostics respecting Judaism we shall recur hereafter. But other

topics must be first attended to. I shall next give some view of the external history of the Gnostics, in connection with an account of those writings from which our information concerning them is to be derived.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE EXTERNAL HISTORY OF THE Gnostics, AND THE SOURCES OF INFORMATION CONCERNING THEM.

IRENÆUS pretends, that all the Gnostics derived their existence from Simon, the magician of Samaria, who is mentioned in the eighth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. He says, that "all heresies had their origin in him";—that he was "the father of all heretics."* All those, he says, who in any way corrupt the truth, or mar the preaching of the church, are disciples and successors of Simon, the Samaritan magician; although, as he honestly adds, "they do not acknowledge him as their master."† The same representation of Simon appears in other, succeeding fathers. But the information of Irenæus and his contemporaries, concerning particular personages and events in the history of Christianity during the first century, except so far as it was derived from the

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. I. c. 23. § 2. p. 99. Lib. III. Præf. p. 173. Lib. II. Præf. p. 115.

† Lib. I. c. 7. § 4. p. 106.

New Testament, was very imperfect and uncertain; and their accounts of Simon are not to be implicitly received.

But there is no doubt, that there was, in the first century, a Simon, a Samaritan, a pretender to divine authority and supernatural powers, who, for a time, had many followers, who stood in a certain relation to Christianity, and who may have held some opinions more or less similar to those of the Gnostics. Justin Martyr mentions him and his followers several times, but gives no account of his doctrines. He only states, that he deceived men by magical arts, and that almost all the Samaritans (the countrymen of Justin) "acknowledged and worshipped him as the First God," "over all rule, authority, and power"; and affirmed, that a woman, whom he carried about with him, named Helena, was the first (hypostatized) conception of his, that is, of the divine mind.* These opinions seem to imply an annihilation of common sense in his followers; but they admit, as we shall see, of some explanation, that may serve to reconcile them to our apprehensions. Justin does not identify the Simon of whom he

* I. Apolog. p. 38, seqq. p. 84. II. Apolog. p. 134. Dial. cum Tryph. p. 397. Ed. Thirlby.

speaks with the Simon mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles ; * and, in modern times, some of the learned have contended that they were different individuals. But Luke describes the Simon whom he mentions as practising magical arts, so as to deprive the Samaritan nation of their senses, and as declaring himself to be some great personage ; and he adds, that all, high and low, affirmed him to be the Power of God, called Great.† When we compare Luke's account with that of Justin, it appears incredible that the two writers should be speaking of two different individuals, who bore the same name, who were conspicuous in the same country, Samaria, and who likewise were contemporaries ; for Justin says of the Simon whom he mentions, that he was at Rome during the reign of Claudius. Believing the accounts of both, therefore, to relate to the same person, we may observe, that Simon, according to Luke, suffered himself to be regarded as a manifestation of what was probably considered as the highest Power of God. From this, it was an easy transition for his followers to speak of him as a manifestation of God, or as God made manifest

* Ch. viii. 9 - 24.

† Acts viii. 9, 10. In the tenth verse, I adopt the reading, *οὗτός ἐστιν ἡ δύναμις τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡ καλουμένη μεγάλη.*

to men, and thus to represent him as God himself. I have here supposed this account to have been given of him by his followers. Some of the fathers subsequent to Justin affirm, that Simon himself claimed to be God. But this was not unlikely to be said, if his adherents so regarded him; for the later opinions of a sect were not uncommonly ascribed to its founder. But, if Simon did use such language concerning himself, it may still be explained in a similar manner. In the assertions which he or his followers made concerning Helena, there was, I conceive, a like vague use of words; but, through the strange accounts given of her, which it is not worth while to detail, we may perhaps discern that she was regarded as the symbol, or the manifestation, of that portion of spirituality which (according to a common conception of the Gnostics) had become entangled in matter, and for the liberation of which the interposition of the Deity was required.

From all the notices of Simon, it does not seem likely that he much affected the character of a speculative philosopher or theologian, or was solicitous to establish any system of doctrines. He appears to have been a bold, artful, vainglorious, dishonest adventurer, claiming to possess supernatural powers, and having much skill in

obtaining control over the minds of others. In Josephus, there is mention of a Simon, pretending to be a magician, who, somewhere about twenty years after the events recorded in the eighth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, was employed by Felix, then Procurator of Judæa, to persuade Drusilla, the wife of Azizus, king of Emesa, to forsake her husband and marry Felix; which Drusilla was prevailed on to do.* It is not improbable that this was the same Simon who is spoken of by St. Luke. Whether he were so or not, the Simon connected with the early history of Christianity may be classed with certain impostors and fanatics, not uncommon in the age in which he lived, who, proceeding on the doctrines of the Pythagorean Platonists (as they may be called), pretended, through mystical exercises of mind, to have attained a communion with the invisible world, and to possess a power, which they denominated *theurgy*, of performing supernatural works by divine assistance. He may be compared with his contemporary, Apollonius of Tyana, whose works Hierocles, an early enemy of Christianity, represented as equalling or excelling those of our

* Josephi Antiq. Lib. XX. c. 7. § 2. — Drusilla is mentioned, Acts xxiv. 24

Lord ; or with a somewhat later impostor, Alexander, the Paphlagonian prophet, on whom Lucian poured out his invective. Like pretensions to magical power were common among the other extravagances of the later Platonists. Plotinus, the most eminent of the sect, was, according to the account of his disciple Porphyry (famous for his work against Christianity), a great theurgist ; and Proclus, than whom none of these philosophers had more alacrity in diving into the deepest and darkest mysteries, is said by his friend and biographer, Marinus, to have been able to bring rain from heaven, to stop earthquakes, and to expel diseases. Simon had learned in a similar school ; and though he was, probably, more of an impostor than a fanatic, yet a religious impostor can hardly be very successful without a mixture of fanaticism. If he succeed in deceiving others, he commonly succeeds, partially at least, in deceiving himself. The false opinion which he creates in those about him reacts on his own mind. Simon, we may suppose, like the generality of men in his age, was a believer in the power of magic, or theurgy ; and, when he saw the miracles performed by Philip, was filled with astonishment, and regarded him as operating through magical powers unknown to himself. Giving credit,

at the same time, to the accounts of the miracles of Jesus, he probably thought him to have been a great theurgist, and wished to become possessed of the secrets which he imagined him to have communicated to his disciples. Being confirmed in this state of mind by witnessing the effects produced by the imposition of the hands of the Apostles, he did what naturally occurred to him, he offered money to purchase their disclosure. He was at first humbled and terrified by the severe rebuke of Peter ; but no evil immediately followed ; and it appears, from the further accounts of him, that he resumed confidence, pursued his former course of life, and was excited to set himself up as a rival of our Lord.

Of the particular events of his subsequent life little is known. It is not probable that he left any writings behind him.* Justin Martyr

* About the end of the fourth century, Jerome, in a single passage (Opp. IV. P. I. col. 114), speaks of books written by Simon : — “ Qui se magnam dicebat esse Dei virtutem ; hæc quoque inter cætera in suis voluminibus scripta dimittens : ‘ Ego sum sermo Dei ; ego sum speciosus, ego Paracletus, ego omnipotens, ego omnia Dei.’ ” Except as a mystical expression of Pantheism, the passage is somewhat too blasphemous for one readily to believe it to have been written by any man in his senses. In regard to books *ascribed* to Simon, if such really existed in Jerome’s time, he is far too late an authority to afford any proof of their genuineness ; and such books are mentioned by no preceding

says, that he visited Rome, and there displayed his pretended magical powers.* Irenæus relates, that he was honored by many as a god; and that images of him and Helena, the former fashioned as Jupiter, and the latter as Minerva, were worshipped by his followers;† and Justin says, that there was at Rome a statue dedicated to him as a god.‡

The history of Simon is an object of interest from the mention of him by St. Luke, and from his early connection with Christianity. The accounts of him, however, afford no means of determining, with any particularity and assurance, what opinions he put forward. But, whatever he taught or affirmed, he did not rest his doctrine on the authority of Christ. Him he emulated; he was not his disciple. The only ground on which his followers might be confounded with Christians is indicated in an ac-

writer. Beausobre (*Histoire du Manichéisme*, I. 259, 260) maintains, what I doubt not is true, that Jerome did not take his pretended quotation from any work of Simon, nor any work which had been commonly believed to be Simon's; though in doing so he has destroyed the only evidence for the opinion, which he himself expresses, that Simon wrote books explanatory of his doctrine. (*Ibid.* p. 259.)

* I. Apolog. p. 39.

† Cont. Hæres. Lib. I. c. 23. §§ 1, 4. pp. 99, 100.

‡ See Additional Note, A.

count of Irenæus, that Simon “taught, that it was he himself who had appeared among the Jews as the Son, had descended as the Father in Samaria, and had visited other nations as the Holy Spirit.” * Conformably to what has been before remarked, that the later opinions of a sect were often ascribed to its founder, I suppose this, or something like this, to have been said, not by Simon, but by some of his followers. Representing him as the Great Power of God, manifested in all divine communications to men, and reckoning Christianity among these communications, they thus brought themselves into some relation to it.

But I imagine them to have been held together as a sect, rather by the admiration of his supposed powers, by the worship of him as a divinity, or the Divinity, and by the study and practice of magical arts, than by the profession of any system of doctrines. However numerous they may at one time have been, they soon dwindled away. Origen charges Celsus with error for speaking of the Simonians as a Christian sect. That writer “was not aware,” he says, “that they are far from acknowledging Jesus as the Son of God ; but affirm that Simon

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. I. c. 23. § 1. p. 99.

was the Power of God. They relate various marvels of their master, who thought, that, if he could acquire such powers as he believed Jesus to possess, he should have as great influence over men." * In another place, he expresses the opinion, that in his time there were not more than thirty Simonians in the world ; he says, that a very few were living in Palestine (the successors, we may presume, of his first Samaritan followers), but that generally, wherever the name of Simon was known, it was through the mention of him in the Acts of the Apostles.† Elsewhere, he speaks of the sect as having ceased to exist. " There are no Simonians," he says, " remaining in the world ; though Simon, in order to draw after him a greater number of followers, relieved them from the danger of death, to which Christians were taught to expose themselves, by teaching them to regard the worship of idols as a matter of indifference." ‡ They worshipped, as we have seen, images of Simon and Helena. Irenæus says, what is altogether probable, that they were men of loose lives, devoted to the study of magic ; §

* Cont. Cels. Lib. V. n. 62. Opp. I. 625, 626.

† Ibid. Lib. I. n. 57. pp. 372, 373.

‡ Cont. Cels. Lib. VI. n. 11. p. 638.

§ Cont. Hæres. Lib. I. c. 23. § 4. p. 100.

and their magical discipline was connected, according to Tertullian,* with paying religious service to angels.

Such, I believe, is the amount of all that can be known, or probably conjectured, concerning Simon and his followers. But, beside the historical notices of him, he is introduced as a principal personage into an ancient work of fiction, called the Clementine Homilies. This work throws some light on the history and character of Gnosticism; and I have given some account of it in a note at the end of this volume.† But no one would pretend, that it is of any authority as regards the history of Simon; and I have there endeavoured to show, that it is of no authority as regards any doctrines he may have held.

Our information being so imperfect and uncertain concerning Simon, the most noted among all who have been represented as Gnostics, either antichristian or heretical, of the first century, we may be prepared for the obscurity and doubt which cloud over the history of other individuals, and of supposed heretical sects, dur-

* De Præscript. Hæret. c. 33. p. 214.

† See Additional Note, B.

ing the same period. Menander, another Samaritan, is said to have been the successor of Simon, and to have claimed, like him, to be one of the Powers of God, manifested for the salvation of men ; * and some stories remain of an individual, called Dositheus, who, Origen says, pretended to be the Jewish Messiah.† We may conclude, perhaps, from these accounts, that, about the time of Simon, there were other less noted impostors of a similar character. These, together with him, may be considered as anti-christian, not heretical.

AMONG the reputed heretics of the first century, using the word *heretic* in its modern sense, there is none of whom the notices are adapted to excite any considerable degree of interest or curiosity, except Cerinthus. Cerinthus is represented by Irenæus, who first mentions him, as a Gnostic leader, contemporary with St. John. He taught, according to Irenæus, that the world

* Irenæus, Lib. I. c. 23. § 5. p. 100.

† Cont. Cels. Lib. I. n. 57. Opp. I. 372. Dositheus is elsewhere spoken of by Origen, in several places ; but is not mentioned by Irenæus, Clement of Alexandria, or Tertullian. — It may here be observed, that the short account of heresies published in the editions of Tertullian, at the end of his book, De Præscriptione Hæreticorum, is not the work of that father. In this account, Dositheus is spoken of.

was not formed by the Supreme God, but by a certain Power, widely separated from him, and ignorant of his existence. He supposed Jesus not to have been born of a virgin, but of Joseph and Mary. He regarded him as having been distinguished from other men by superior wisdom and virtue. Into him, at his baptism, he believed that Christ descended, from "that Principality which is over all" (the Pleroma), in the form of a dove; and that then he announced the Unknown Father, and performed miracles. At the crucifixion, Christ, who was spiritual and impassible, reascended from Jesus, and Jesus suffered alone. He alone died, and rose from the dead.* Irenæus also relates an idle tale, which, he says, some had heard from Polycarp, that John, while residing at Ephesus, on going to bathe, found Cerinthus in the building, and rushed out, exclaiming, "Let us fly; lest the bath should fall upon us; Cerinthus, the enemy of truth, being within."† He further supposes, that one purpose of John in writing his Gospel was to confute the errors of Cerinthus.‡

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. I. c. 26. § 1. p. 105.

† Cont. Hæres. Lib. III. c. 3. § 4. p. 177. — The same story is told by Epiphanius, not of Cerinthus, but of Ebion. Hæres. XXX. § 23. pp. 148, 149.

‡ Lib. III. c. 11. § 1. p. 188.

In the account given by Irenæus of the doctrines of Cerinthus there is nothing, perhaps, intrinsically improbable; and from this account it would appear that Cerinthus held the characteristic doctrines of the Gnostics. But the Roman presbyter, Caius, contemporary with Irenæus, represents him as a believer in a millennium, in which sensual pleasures were to be enjoyed, and affirms him to have been the author of a certain book, which Caius so describes, as to leave, I think, little doubt that he intended the Apocalypse. He speaks of Cerinthus as one "who, in Revelations, written under the name of a great Apostle, introduced forged accounts of marvels, which he pretended had been shown him by angels; and taught, that, after the resurrection, there was to be an earthly reign of Christ; and that men, dwelling in Jerusalem, would again become slaves to the lusts and pleasures of the flesh." * In the last half of the third century, Dionysius of Alexandria, referring probably to this passage, says, that some of those before him had ascribed the Apoc-

* Ἀλλὰ καὶ Κήρυθος, ὁ δι' ἀποκαλύψαν ὡς ὑπὸ ἀποστόλου μεγάλου γεγραμμένων τεραταλογίας ἡμῖν ὡς δι' ἀγγέλων αὐτῷ δειγμένας ψευδόμενος ἐπεισάγει, λέγων, μετὰ τὴν ἀνάστασιν ἐπίγειον εἶναι τὸ βασίλειον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, κ. τ. λ. Apud Euseb. Hist. Eccles. Lib. III. c. 28.

alypse to Cerinthus, regarding it as an unintelligible and incoherent book; and he himself assigns to Cerinthus the same Jewish notions concerning the millennium which Caius had represented him as holding.* In the account of Irenæus, Cerinthus appears as an early Gnostic; but the expectation of a millennial reign of Christ had its origin in the belief of the Jews, antecedent to Christianity, concerning the temporal reign of their Messiah. The doctrine was Jewish in its origin and character, and altogether foreign from the conceptions of the Gnostics. They could not but revolt at the idea of assigning to their Christ a glorious reign on this earth, which, in their view, was the dwelling-place of imperfection and evil, over followers re clothed in what they regarded as the pollution of flesh. But, according to Irenæus, Cerinthus coincided with the Gnostics in holding their essential doctrines of an Unknown God, of an ignorant and imperfect Creator, and of the necessity of a divine interposition through Christ, descending from the pure world of spirits. Agreeing with them thus far, he could hardly but have agreed with them in their views of the millennium. This doctrine was ascribed

* Ibid. et Lib. VIII. c. 25.

to him in connection with the supposed authorship of the Apocalypse. But the strongly marked character of the Apocalypse is such as to render it impossible that it should have been written by a Gnostic, or by one holding the doctrines that Irenæus attributes to Cerinthus. The supposition would have been too glaring an absurdity to have been made by Caius, or countenanced by Dionysius. They, therefore, did not regard him as holding those doctrines. On the other hand, they not improbably considered him as an Ebionite, according to one part of the representation which, as we shall see, was given by Epiphanius concerning him.

Cerinthus is not named (and the fact is of importance in forming a judgment concerning his history) by Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, or Origen. From this we may conclude, that he was not particularly conspicuous in the first century; that he left no reputation which had made a deep impression on the minds of men; that there was no considerable body of heretics bearing his name in the second and third centuries; and that no writings of his were extant of any celebrity. Probably there were none whatever; for, except a story of Epiphanius about a pretended gospel, which we shall elsewhere have occasion to examine, none are referred to by any writer.

Justin Martyr, as has been mentioned, does not name Cerinthus. On the contrary, he implies his ignorance of any individuals who separated the man Jesus and the Æon Christ in the manner in which Cerinthus and his followers are said to have done by Irenæus. In a passage in which he is speaking of the Gnostics generally, and in which he particularly mentions the names of the leading sects, he describes them as "not teaching the doctrines of Christ, but those of the spirits of delusion"; yet "professing themselves to be Christians, and professing that Jesus who was crucified was the Lord and Christ." * According to the account of Irenæus, Cerinthus and his followers could have made no such profession. The distinction that was in fact supposed by the theosophic Gnostics between the Æon Christ and the man Jesus, Justin, if it existed in his day, overlooked; and it could hardly, therefore, have been a doctrine that had its origin in the first century, when Cerinthus is said to have lived.

Of this reputed heretic we have further notices in Epiphanius; † but with that writer we enter the region of fable. After repeating, in

* Dial. cum Tryph. p. 207.

† *Hæres.* XXVIII. Opp. I. 110, seqq.

effect, the brief account of Irenæus, he subjoins, that Cerinthus was a zealot for the Mosaic Law ; * though, with a disregard of probability common enough in his stories, he states at the same time, that Cerinthus “affirmed that the giver of the Law was not good.”† Epiphanius, among other fictions, pretends that he was a leader of those Jewish Christians, mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, who contended that the Gentile converts must be circumcised. He thus ascribes to him the two opposite heresies of the Gnostics and the Ebionites. It may be noted, also, as remarkable even among the blunders of Epiphanius, that he first follows Irenæus in stating the belief of Cerinthus to have been, that Jesus suffered and rose again, while Christ returned to the Pleroma,‡ and shortly after asserts, that Cerinthus “dared to affirm that Christ suffered and was crucified, and was not yet raised, but would rise in the general resurrection.”§ He concludes by expressing his uncer-

* Ibid. pp. 110 – 113.

† *ἔδοξε γὰρ τὸν νόμον δεδωκότα οὐκ ἀγαθόν.* Ibid. p. 111. Such a representation, says Massuet, the Benedictine editor of Irenæus, hardly obtains credit with men in their senses, *vix fidem apud sobrios obtinet.* See his *Dissertatio Prima in Libb. Irenæi. De Cerintho.* n. 127. p. 53.

‡ *Hæres.* XXVIII. p. 111.

§ Ibid. p. 113.

tainty whether Cerinthus and Merinthus were the same or two different heretics.

From the contradictory accounts of Cerinthus; from the silence respecting him of the four Christian writers of highest eminence during the period in which they lived, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen; from the implication of Justin, that he knew of no heretics holding such opinions as Irenæus ascribes to Cerinthus; and from the fables which Epiphanius has connected with his name, we may infer that very little was certainly known concerning him. Of the stories relating to him it may seem the most probable solution, that there was a heretic of that name in the first century, of whom little or no information had been preserved, except that he was a heretic; and that, it not being certainly known in what his error consisted, Cerinthus had, hence, the ill-fortune to have ascribed to him divers contradictory heresies, which different writers supposed to have had their origin in that early period, and was sometimes made a Gnostic, sometimes an Ebionite, and sometimes a millenarian, and the forger of the Apocalypse.

FROM the fathers we can derive no information concerning the existence of Gnostics in the

first century, more satisfactory than what has been stated. It has been thought, however, that there are references to them in the New Testament itself; and this is a subject that has been much discussed. It may be, that they are referred to in what has been called the Second Epistle of Peter, and in the Epistle ascribed to Jude. But these writings were not generally acknowledged by the early Christians as the works of those Apostles; and we have no reason to assign them an earlier date than the first half of the second century. There seems to me no good reason for believing that Gnostics are taken notice of in any genuine writing of an Apostle; nor, I may here add, do I think it probable that any Gnostic system had been formed, or any Gnostic sect was in existence, before the end of the first century.

In the Epistles of St. Paul, the false teachers and the false doctrines that he refers to were for the most part evidently of Jewish origin. Nor do I perceive in them an allusion to any peculiar doctrine of the Gnostics. When we keep in mind what those peculiar doctrines were, — the introduction of an Unknown God; — the ascribing of the creation, and of the origin of the Jewish religion, to an imperfect being or beings; — the representing of Christ as a

manifestation of the Unknown God, or a messenger from him, who merely used Jesus as an organ for his communications, or had only the unsubstantial semblance of a human body ;— and the speculations of the theosophic Gnostics, founded on hypostatizing the ideas and attributes of God ;— when we recollect what were the characteristic doctrines of the Gnostics, we shall perceive, I think, that there is no reference to them in those passages in which St. Paul has been supposed, by some, to have had them in view. The strong, general language in which he sometimes speaks of the false teachers of his day, though often sufficiently applicable to a portion of the Gnostics, as it is to false teachers of later times, contains nothing by which those heretics are particularly designated. Had St. Paul been acquainted with any professed expounders of Christianity, who were attempting to introduce *the* fundamental doctrine of the Gnostics, the doctrine of an Unknown God, different from the God of the Jews, his Epistles would have left no shadow of uncertainty respecting the fact. On this ground I think it may be determined from them, that no heretics of such a character existed in his time.

Nor does it appear probable that the Gnos-

tics are referred to by St. John, in the introduction to his Gospel. The passage has been explained, as if the Apostle alluded to a scheme, like that of Valentinus, concerning the derivation of *Æons* from the Supreme Being. But there seems no reason to suppose that such a scheme existed in the time of the Apostle. Valentinus, who did not appear till somewhere about thirty years later, is represented as the author of the scheme taught by him, with which the language of St. John has been compared. The names which Valentinus gave to some of his thirty *Æons* correspond to names found in the introduction of St. John's Gospel; but it is more probable that they were suggested to him by this introduction, than that the Apostle referred to them as already employed by Gnostics. The Valentinians made use of the passage in question, and accommodated it to their opinions, as they did the rest of the New Testament, as far as was in their power.

It has been especially thought, that St. John, in his first Epistle, animadverts either on the opinion existing in the second century among the theosophic Gnostics, that the man Jesus was to be distinguished from the *Æon* Christ, as a distinct agent; which was connected with the doctrine, that Jesus had not a proper human

body of flesh and blood ; or, on the opinion of the Docetæ, that the apparent body of Jesus was a mere phantom. He has been supposed to do so in the passage in which he says, — “ Every spirit [that is, every teacher] professing that Jesus is the Messiah [or Christ] *come in the flesh* is from God ; and every spirit which professes not Jesus is not from God.”* But it seems to me most probable that the Apostle merely had in view individuals who denied that Jesus was the Messiah, and objected that the Messiah would not have come, as Jesus had done, to lead a life of hardship, and die a cruel and ignominious death ; that he would not have “ come in the flesh,” that is, exposed to all the accidents and sufferings of humanity. Perhaps, however, by the Messiah’s “ coming in the flesh,” St. John meant nothing more than that he had “ appeared in the world,” that he had “ appeared among men.” That the words were not essential to the main idea which he wished to express is evident from his omitting them in a corresponding passage, where he likewise refers to the false teachers to whom Christians

* 1 John iv. 2, 3. I omit, with Griesbach and other critics, the words in the last clause, answering to those italicized in what follows : — “ And every spirit which professes not *that Jesus has come in the flesh* is not from God.”

were exposed, and where he simply describes them as "denying that Jesus is the Messiah." * In this latter passage, if in either, one might suppose him to have had Christian heretics in view, for he says that those of whom he speaks had separated themselves from the body of Christians ; † but it is clear that he did not here refer to individuals as holding any Gnostic doctrine, but to proper apostates and unbelievers.

It may appear, therefore, that little or nothing can be inferred from any authentic source to prove the existence of Gnostic systems or sects during the first century. ‡ The accounts of supposed Gnostics given by Irenæus and

* 1 John ii. 22.

† "They have gone out from us." Ibid. ii. 19.

‡ In treating of the heretics of the first century, I, of course, make no use of the pretended Epistles of Ignatius, of the character of which I have spoken in the preceding volume (p. cclx. seqq.). — Jerome (*Advers. Luciferianos*, Opp. IV. P. II. col. 304), in a declamatory passage, full, as I conceive, of misstatements, asserts, that, "while the Apostles were still living, while the blood of Christ was still recent in Judæa, it was maintained that the body of Christ was a phantom." But the authority of such a writer, at the end of the fourth century, is of no weight. Gibbon, however, twice imitates the passage of Jerome, and repeats his assertion. (*History of the Roman Empire*, Ch. XXI. Vol. III. p. 120, and Ch. XLVII. Vol. VIII. p. 266.)

others will not bear the test of examination, as we have seen in the case of Cerinthus; or relate, as in the case of Simon Magus and Menander, not to Christian heretics, but to antichristian impostors. But we are now about to quit the uncertain ground over which we have hitherto made our way, and enter on a somewhat more open road. In the earlier part of the second century, light breaks in upon us, and individuals and systems distinctly appear. We likewise find evidence to confirm the conclusion to which we have arrived, that the Gnostics did not before this time make their appearance.

There is no dispute that the leading sects of the Gnostics, that is to say, the Valentinians and the Marcionites, with whom the Basilidians may perhaps be classed,* had their origin after the close of the first century. "Subsequently to the teaching of the Apostles," says Clement of Alexandria, "about the reign of Adrian [A. D. 117 – 138], appeared those who devised heretical opinions, and they continued to live till that of the elder Antoninus [A. D. 138 –

* Origen, when speaking generally of the Gnostics, often mentions these three sects in connection, as representatives of their body. The Basilidians, like the Valentinians, were theosophic Gnostics, whom we shall have occasion to consider more particularly hereafter.

161]. Of this number was Basilides, though, as his followers boast, he claimed Glaucias, the interpreter of Peter, for his teacher; as it is likewise reported that Valentinus was a hearer of Theudas, who was familiar with Paul. As for Marcion, who was their contemporary, he continued to remain as an old man with his juniors." *

* Stomat. VII. § 17. pp. 898, 899. The rendering, "continued to remain as an old man with his juniors," is founded on a conjectural emendation. The sentence now stands in Clement thus: — *Μαρκίων γὰρ κατὰ τὴν αὐτὴν αὐτοῖς ἡλικίαν γερόμενος, ὡς πρεσβύτης νεωτέροις συνεγένετο· μεθ' ὃν Σίμων ἐπ' ὀλίγον κηρύσσοντος τοῦ Πέτρου ὑπήκουσεν.* For *συνεγένετο· μεθ' ὃν*, I would read *συνεγένετο μένων*. Marcion, as will be immediately mentioned above, is spoken of by Justin Martyr as still living in his time, about the year 150.

The words relating to Simon, *Σίμων ἐπ' ὀλίγον κηρύσσοντος τοῦ Πέτρου ὑπήκουσεν*, are evidently foreign from the purpose of Clement. He is insisting that the heretical teachers appeared after the apostolic age. But, according to the words in question, Simon is represented, not as a heretic who appeared after the apostolic age, but as contemporary with St. Peter; while, if their connection with what precedes by *μεθ' ὃν* be retained, he is at the same time affirmed to have succeeded Marcion. It seems, therefore, not unlikely that the words were originally a marginal annotation, which has been introduced into the text of Clement, and which was made by some one, who, thinking Simon the author of all the Gnostic heresies, observed that Clement had omitted to mention him. But Simon is nowhere so spoken of by Clement.

That there is some corruption of the text of the sentence I have quoted is evident; and various emendations have been proposed. See the note on it in Potter's edition of Clement, and Lewald's *Commentatio de Doctrinâ Gnosticâ*, p. 12, seqq.

The account of Clement respecting Valentinus and Marcion corresponds with what is said by Irenæus ; who states that Valentinus “ came to Rome while Hyginus was bishop, flourished during the time of Pius, and remained till that of Anicetus. — Marcion was at his height under Anicetus.” * The particular dates assigned to these three bishops of Rome are so various and uncertain as to make it not worth while to give them ; but the first died some time before, and the last survived, the middle of the second century. Justin Martyr, who wrote his first Apology about the year 150, twice speaks in it of Marcion as then living ; † and Tertullian refers both Marcion and Valentinus to the times of Antoninus Pius. ‡

The Valentinians, Marcionites, and Basilidians are all mentioned in the remaining works of Justin Martyr. In his Dialogue with Trypho, he says, that the existence of men who, though Christians in profession, teach not the doctrines of Christ, but those of the spirits of delusion, serves to confirm the faith of the true believer ; because it is a fulfilment of the prophecies of

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. III. c. 4. § 3. pp. 178, 179.

† I. Apolog. p. 43, p. 85.

‡ Advers. Marcion. Lib. I. c. 19. p. 374. De Præscript. Hæret. c. 30. p. 212. .

Christ. He had declared that false teachers should come in his name, having the skins of sheep, but being ravening wolves within. "And accordingly," says Justin, "there are and have been many coming in the name of Jesus, who have taught men to say and do impious and blasphemous things." "Some in one way, and some in another, teach men to blaspheme the Maker of All, and the Messiah who was prophesied as coming from him; and the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob." In these words Justin refers to the fundamental doctrines of the Gnostics, that the maker of the material universe, or the chief of those by whom it was made, was not the Supreme God, but a being imperfect in power, wisdom, and goodness; that the same being was the god of the Jews; and that the expected Jewish Messiah, who had been foretold as coming from him, had been superseded by another, an unexpected messenger of a far higher character and office, coming from and revealing the true God. Some of the heretics mentioned, Justin proceeds to say, "are called Marcionites, some Valentinians, some Basilidians, some Saturnilians, and others by different names, after their leaders." * The Sa-

* Dial. cum Tryph. pp. 207 - 209.

turnilians or followers of Saturnilus, or Saturninus, as he is more commonly called, were an obscure sect which requires no particular notice.

The Marcionites are twice mentioned by Justin elsewhere. "Marcion of Pontus," he says, "under the impulse of evil demons, is even now teaching men to deny the God who is the Maker of all things celestial and terrestrial, and the Messiah his Son, who was foretold by the prophets, and proclaiming a certain other God beside the Maker of all things, and likewise another Son." *

Beside these notices of them in his remaining works, Justin composed, as he himself informs us,† a treatise against all heresies; but this is not extant. Irenæus‡ quotes a book of Justin against Marcion, which was perhaps a portion of the work just mentioned, but which, whether it were so or not, is also lost.

SUCH being the case, the most important authority respecting the history of the early heretics, except the Marcionites, is Justin's contemporary, Irenæus. The large work of Irenæus which remains to us (principally in an ancient

* I. Apolog. p. 85; vide etiam p. 43.

† I. Apolog. p. 44.

‡ Cont. Hæres. Lib. IV. c. 6. § 2. p. 233.

Latin translation) is occupied by the statement and refutation of their opinions. Though he gives accounts of other heresies, he writes with particular reference to the Valentinians, whom he regarded as the chief of the Gnostic sects.* "The doctrine of the Valentinians," says Irenæus, "is a summary of all heresies, and he who confutes those heretics confutes every other."† He explains at length their theory as it existed in his day, not indeed in its original form, as it proceeded from Valentinus, but as it had been subsequently modified by one of his most distinguished followers, Ptolemy.‡ After-

* Ibid. Lib. I. Præf. § 2. p. 3.

† Ibid. Lib. IV. Præf. § 2. p. 227. conf. Lib. II. c. 31. § 1. p. 163.

‡ The system of the Valentinians explained at length by Irenæus is the system as taught by Ptolemy. In the introduction to his account Irenæus says expressly, — "I will according to my ability give an account of the doctrine of their present false teachers, I mean that of the Ptolemæans, — τὴν γνώμην αὐτῶν τῶν νῦν παραδιδασκόντων, λέγω δὴ τῶν περὶ Προλεμαίων · — this being a collection of the choicest flowers of the Valentinian school." Lib. I. Præf. § 2. p. 3. And he concludes his account of it with these words : — "Such is the system of Ptolemy" : "Et Ptolemæus quidem ita." Lib. I. c. 8. (*in fine*) p. 43. To this account of the Ptolemæo-Valentinian system he subjoins, as I mention above, a short statement of the system as originally taught by Valentinus himself. Tertullian, likewise, evidently regarded the system, which is given at length by Irenæus, and which he also details, as that of Valentinus modified by Ptolemy. See his

wards he gives an account of the original scheme of Valentinus, which does not appear

work "Adversus Valentinianos," particularly chapters 8, 12, 19, 33.

But Mosheim (in his "Commentarii de Rebus Christianorum ante Constantinum") mistakes the system of the Valentinians as modified by Ptolemy for the original doctrine of Valentinus himself, and represents Ptolemy as holding a still different system (p. 389, seqq.). He was led into this error by Epiphanius. Irenæus and Tertullian, after explaining the Ptolemæo-Valentinian system, both speak of a modification of it introduced by some disciples of Ptolemy. Comp. Irenæus, Lib. I. c. 12. p. 56, in the old Latin version, with Tertullian, c. 33. But Epiphanius (Hæres. XXXIII. § 1. p. 215), in copying Irenæus, with his usual incorrectness and confusion of mind, represents this modification as introduced by Ptolemy himself, and hence has given occasion to the mistake I have mentioned, which appears in other writers beside Mosheim; as, for instance, in Walch. See his "History of the Heretics" (in German), Vol. I. p. 388.

But this is not the only error respecting Ptolemy into which Mosheim has fallen. He says (*ubi sup.*): — "Among those who are reported to have been disciples of Valentinus was Ptolemy, a subtle and eloquent man, who departed in several particulars from the common opinions of his sect, especially in naming and arranging the Æons differently from his master, and, as appears, in changing them into powers of God. Secundus, on the other hand, whom Irenæus reckons among the principal disciples of Valentinus, maintained that the Æons were substances or persons." "It is certain," says Mosheim, in his note on this passage, "that Ptolemy differed from Secundus concerning the nature of the Æons, the former regarding them as attributes and powers of the divine nature, and the latter as substances or persons; while each contended that his was the true opinion of his master." Hence Mosheim concludes, that Valentinus was a man of some genius, but of weak understanding, who left most of his opinions obscurely defined.

to have differed in any essential particular from the modification of it by Ptolemy.*

The statements of Irenæus respecting the Valentinians are confirmed by Tertullian in a work written expressly against that sect,† which so closely resembles the account of Irenæus, as to leave little doubt that he took this for the basis of his own ; though there is no reason for

According to Mosheim, Ptolemy regarded the *Æons* as only "attributes and powers of the divine nature," not "as substances or persons." This statement is inconsistent not merely with the true system of Ptolemy, but equally with that of his followers, which Mosheim ascribes to him ; and is directly contrary to the account of Tertullian, who says that "Ptolemy numbered the *Æons* in classes and gave them distinct names, assigning to them the character of personal existences, but external to the Deity, while Valentinus had included those existences in the totality of the Divinity, as feelings, affections, and emotions" : "Eam [i. e. Valentini viam] postmodum instravit nominibus et numeris *Æonum* distinctis ; in personales substantias, sed extra Deum, determinatas [f. determinans], quas Valentinus in ipsâ summâ divinitatis, ut sensus et affectus et motus, incluserat." *Advera. Valentin.* c. 4. p. 251.

I have noticed particularly these errors of Mosheim, because, from his high reputation, in many respects well deserved, and from the general familiarity with his name, as a writer on ecclesiastical history, he is likely to be one of the first authors consulted by an English student. But his accounts of the Gnostics are not to be relied on. He did not, as I conceive, rightly apprehend their distinguishing characteristics ; and, at the same time, the bent of his mind to systematize and form hypotheses led him to overlook and mistake facts, so that he is often incorrect, falling into such errors as have just been remarked.

* Lib. I. c. 11. p. 52, seqq. † *Adversus Valentinianos.*

supposing that his acquaintance with the doctrines of the Valentinians was derived only from the writings of that earlier father. Many notices of them are found in his other works, and in those of Clement of Alexandria, and of Origen. These notices confirm generally what is stated by Irenæus, and add something to the information which he affords.

We have also some remains of the writings of Valentinians themselves. The most important of them is a letter by Ptolemy, preserved by Epiphanius.* It is addressed to a lady, whose name was Flora, and contains an account of his opinions concerning the origin and character of the Jewish Law, and the god of the Jews, whom he identifies with the Maker of the World. However erroneous may be the opinions of Ptolemy, he expresses himself with good sense, and his manner is unobjectionable.

Epiphanius has likewise given an extract from the work of some one, whom he calls a Valentinian, but whose name he does not mention.† It relates to the derivation of the Æons. The writer commences by professing his intention to

* Hæres. XXXIII. p. 216, seqq. * The letter of Ptolemy is also printed in the Appendix to Massuet's edition of Irenæus.

† Hæres. XXXI. p. 168, seqq. — Apud Irenæi Opp. Ed. Massuet, p. 355.

speak of "things nameless and supercelestial, which cannot be fully comprehended by principalities, nor powers, nor those in subjection, nor by any one, but are manifest only to the thought of the Unchangeable"; and he proceeds in a manner conformable to this annunciation, so discouraging to a common reader. It is a very offensive specimen of the extravagances of some of the Gnostics. Epiphanius, as has been mentioned, ascribes it to a Valentinian. But, from its want of correspondence with the preceding accounts of the different systems held by Valentinus and his followers, it affords additional proof, either that the speculations of the Valentinians were continually changing their form, or that the names of ancient sects were very loosely applied in the time of Epiphanius.*

There is also a work consisting in great part of extracts from one or more writers of the

* In the passage quoted by Epiphanius, there are allusions of the grossest kind in reference to the production of the *Æons*. Such language, as Clement of Alexandria informs us, was used, in his time, by the followers of an individual, named Prodicus; but Clement, in speaking of them, exculpates the Valentinians from the imputation of such impurity: — *Εἰ γὰρ καὶ οὗτοι, καθάπερ οἱ ἐπὶ Οὐδαιῶν, πνευματικὰς ἐτίθεντο κοινωνίας, ἴσως τις αὐτῶν τὴν ὑπόληψιν ἐπέδεξαστο· σαρκικῆς δὲ ὕβρεως κοινωνίαν εἰς προφητείας ἀγίας ἀνάγειν ἀνεργηκότος ἐστὶ τὴν σωτηρίαν.* Stromat. III. § 4. pp. 524, 525.

school of Valentinus.* But it is of less value than might be expected. It presents no connected system. Its language is very obscure; its text appears to have been but ill preserved, and there is a difficulty in distinguishing between the words and sentiments of the compiler and those which he quotes.

Beside the writings mentioned, Origen has preserved various passages from a commentary on the Gospel of John by Heracleon, a distinguished Valentinian of the second century; and Clement of Alexandria affords us another extract from Heracleon and a few extracts from the works of Valentinus himself.†

Of the opinions of Marcion and his followers our information is nearly or quite as ample. Irenæus, indeed, gives but a short account of them; it having been his intention, as he states,

* The title of this compilation is Ἐκ τῶν Θεοδότου, καὶ [ῥ. Ἐκ τῶν Θεοδότου. Δ] τῆς Ἀνατολικῆς καλουμένης Διδασκαλίας κατὰ τοὺς Οὐαλεντινίου χρόνους Ἐπιτομαί, that is, if the proposed emendation be admitted, "From the Writings of Theodotus. The Heads of the Oriental Doctrine, so called, as it existed in the Age of Valentinus." I shall quote the work under the name of "Doctrina Orientalis." It may be found in Potter's edition of the Works of Clement of Alexandria, p. 986, seqq.

† These fragments of Heracleon and Valentinus are collected in the Appendix to Massuet's edition of Irenæus.

to refute that heretic in a separate treatise. This work, if he ever accomplished it, which is not probable, is now lost. The reasons which he assigns for discussing Marcion's system by itself deserve attention. He says, — "Because *Marcion alone has dared openly to mutilate the Scriptures*, and has gone beyond all others in shamelessly disparaging the character of God [the Creator], I shall oppose him by himself, confuting him from his own writings; and with the help of God effect his overthrow by means of those discourses of our Lord and his Apostle [St. Paul] which are respected by him, and which he himself uses." * In speaking of Marcion's disparaging the character of God, Irenæus refers, as will be readily understood, not to Marcion's opinions concerning the Supreme Being, but to his opinions concerning that inferior agent whom the Gnostics conceived of as the Maker of the World. In the view of Irenæus, the Supreme God and the Maker of the World being the same, what was said unworthily of the latter he regarded as virtually said of the former.

The information respecting the Marcionites which we miss in Irenæus is abundantly sup-

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. I. c. 27. § 4. p. 106.

plied by Tertullian in his long and elaborate treatise, "Against Marcion"; a composition that so clearly exhibits the workings of a powerful mind, in which striking thoughts are presented with such condensation of language, expressions stand out in such bold relief, and arguments are sometimes so rapidly developed, as, notwithstanding a difficult style and a corrupt text, to fix the attention, and create an interest in the exposition and confutation of obsolete errors. Of Marcion and his followers we find mention, likewise, in other works of Tertullian, and in those of Clement and of Origen; and, in addition to what is given by Tertullian, Epiphanius affords some further information, which there is no particular reason to distrust, respecting Marcion's mutilations of the New Testament.

As regards other Gnostic sects existing in the second century, our principal information must be derived from the earlier fathers who have been mentioned, Irenæus, Tertullian, Clement, and Origen.* For the most part, the later fa-

* I have already had occasion to mention the addition by another writer to Tertullian's work *De Præscriptione*. (See p. 71, note †.) The date of its composition is uncertain. It is a brief summary of some of the common accounts of the heretical sects,

thers who have written concerning the Gnostics either copy their predecessors, or present us, instead of facts, with misconceptions, fictions, and calumnies; or perhaps report under some ancient name the doctrines and practices ascribed to supposed individuals of their own day, who, if such individuals really existed, had little in common with those by whom the name given to them had been formerly borne. If we would have any just conceptions of Christian antiquity, we must never lose sight of the distinction between the *earlier* and the *later* fathers, between those who wrote before, and those who wrote after, the establishment of Christianity as the religion of the Empire. It has been greatly neglected. It admits of particular exceptions and much qualification in favor of individuals. But, generally, a wide separation is to be made between the patient or stern sufferers of the ages of persecution, whose religion was the principle of their lives, and the courtier bishops who frequented the imperial palace, the factious and virulent party-leaders who rent the church with their dissensions, and the fiery ascetics to whom monastic superstition gave birth.

evidently made with little investigation, and, consequently, of little value. An undue weight is sometimes given it, by its being quoted as if written by Tertullian.

Of the later writers concerning the Gnostics, the first to be mentioned is Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, during the latter part of the fourth century, and the author of a large work "Against Eighty Heresies." He was a zealot of a mean mind and persecuting temper. He had a childish love of multiplying the sects and names of the heretics, and was unsparing in loading them with opprobrium. He was, undoubtedly, credulous, and has sometimes told in good faith what cannot be believed; but the stories that he relates on his own authority show that his want of truth was equal to his want of good sense. In some of those charges which he is ever ready to bring against the heretics, he discovers a mind familiar with the most loathsome conceptions of impurity. His work, at the same time, is full of blunders and contradictory statements, arising from ignorance, negligence, and want of capacity. Still something may be learnt from it, and the testimony of Epiphanius may deserve attention, when his reports are intrinsically probable, when they coincide with and complete the information of some more credible writer, when they are in opposition to his own prejudices, or in cases in which there was no temptation to falsehood and small liability to mistake. Sometimes, also, we may form a

probable conjecture, by considering on what facts a particular misrepresentation, coming from a writer of such a character, was likely to be founded. Even where his accounts in their gross state are false, it has been found possible, by combining them with the information received from others, by subjecting them to an analysis and applying the proper tests, to detect and separate a portion of truth.

WE pass to a work on heresies, entitled "A Dialogue concerning the Right Faith in God," *De Rectâ in Deum Fide*.* This has sometimes been regarded as a work of Origen; but it is the production of a later writer, who lived after the establishment of Christianity as the religion of the Empire, and appears to have borne, like Origen, the name of Adamantius; it being now ascribed in its title to an author of that name. In determining the opinions of the ancient heretics, too much credit has been given to this work, which deserves little or no consideration when its accounts are inconsistent with those of the earlier fathers. It is the production of one who was very imperfectly acquainted with the

* It is published in the first volume of De la Rue's edition of Origen.

real doctrines of the Gnostics, if he meant to represent them correctly, and who has, in consequence, improperly assigned to different sects opinions which it was his purpose to confute.*

* There is one error in this work, which is essentially inconsistent with what have been stated as the fundamental doctrines of the Gnostics, and which, from that circumstance, and from its strikingly illustrating the character of the work, may be here pointed out.

In the fourth section of this Dialogue (Origen. Opp. I. 840), one of the speakers, bearing the character of a Valentinian, is represented as reading a long passage, of which Valentinus himself is said to be the author. According to this passage, and the subsequent representations of the author of the Dialogue, Valentinus and his followers regarded the Supreme Being as the immediate architect of the material universe. But the full and clear testimony of all the more ancient writers on the subject, and the undoubted remains of the writings of Valentinians, leave no doubt that this is a gross error.

Fortunately, we are able to trace the history of this misrepresentation. The pretended words of Valentinus, with a part of the Dialogue which follows, are transcribed from an older work, a dialogue that has been attributed to Methodius, a Christian writer about the close of the third century. This will appear from a comparison of the Dialogue *de Rectâ Fide*, pp. 840-845, with the dialogue ascribed to Methodius, in the edition of his works by Combefis, pp. 352-366. In this older dialogue the pretended words of Valentinus appear as the language of one of the speakers, who bears the name of Valens or Valentinus, it is uncertain which, but who is neither represented as the distinguished heretic Valentinus, nor as belonging to his school, nor indeed as a heretic of any sect. In its original state, therefore, the passage can be regarded neither as one proceeding from Valentinus, nor as an exposition of the doctrine of the Valentinians. If the writer of the

In the latter half of the fourth century, a work on heresies was composed by Philaster,

Dialogue de Rectâ Fide intended to give a correct representation, it must have been through some strange misconception, and great ignorance of his subject, that he has made use of the passage as he has done.

It may here be observed, that the older dialogue ascribed to Methodius appears to have been in fact the composition of a still earlier writer, Maximus, supposed to have lived in the second century. It is named as his work, and a long quotation is given from it, by Eusebius in his "*Præparatio Evangelica*" (Lib. VII. p. 337, seqq. Ed. Viger. conf. Origenis *Philocalia*, c. 24. pp. 82 - 90. Ed. Spencer); and in his *Ecclesiastical History*, he mentions Maximus as the author of what appears to be the same work. (Lib. V. c. 27.)

The great difficulty which presents itself, if any credit be attached to the representation of the Valentinian system given in the *Dialogue de Rectâ Fide*, has been little attended to. Mosheim (*Comment. de Rebus Christian.* p. 27. not.) refers to the *Dialogue* as a work of Origen, and to the passage in question as a genuine fragment of Valentinus; but takes no notice of either in his long account of the Valentinian system. Beausobre, also, views the passage as genuine, and quotes it to prove that Valentinus regarded matter as coeternal with the Deity; and that the ancient fathers had misrepresented his doctrine concerning its origin. (*Hist. du Manichéisme*, Tom. II. pp. 159, 160.) In his earnestness to establish these points, he does not suffer his attention to rest on the fact, that the supposed fragment of Valentinus is irreconcilable with all our best established knowledge respecting the Gnostics. No Gnostic sect regarded the Supreme Being as the immediate architect of the material universe. As regards the coeternity of *primitive* matter with the Deity, it was, in all probability, a doctrine held by Valentinus and by all the other Gnostics, nor do I conceive that the early fathers assert any thing contradictory to the supposition.

Notwithstanding the length of this note, I would here make a

bishop of Brescia in Italy, a writer of the lowest order. It is full of almost pitiable weaknesses.

few remarks on the work just quoted, the *Histoire de Manichée et du Manichéisme*, by Beausobre. It is one to which I have been much indebted, and with which I must often disagree, where I shall not think it necessary to direct attention to the fact. It is, in many respects, a model of the manner in which ecclesiastical history should be *critically* studied; using the word *critically* in contradistinction to regarding the study under a moral, religious, or philosophical aspect. Though the Manicheans alone are its professed subject, it is one of the most important works in modern times, perhaps the most important, on the subject of the Gnostics also. It is free from bigotry. The author has no prejudices against the heretics, and none in favor of their catholic opponents. His prejudices are of an opposite kind. His learning is various and abundant; his style lively and clear; and in the examination of details he is quick-sighted, acute, and ingenious, often detecting error and falsehood. But his vivacity and originality sometimes betray him into merely specious hypotheses and expositions, in support of which he brings together far-sought and unsound authorities, and over-subtle arguments. His great deficiency, however, as it seems to me, consists in the want of a distinct and correct conception of the general character either of the Manicheans or of the Gnostics. Thus he has no sufficient standard to guide him in judging of particulars concerning them. There is also in his work a want of lucid arrangement; the parts which precede serve but little to prepare the way for those that follow. The space assigned to different topics is disproportioned to their relative importance; and there is too much matter intermixed that is merely incidental to the main subjects of discussion. Thus we may close the book with a feeling that it contains a great amount of information, that it suggests and facilitates many inquiries; but, at the same time, with no very well-defined notions of the ancient heretics of whom it treats. Yet it would be ungrateful in one, who has been engaged in the same investigations, not to express his obligations to Beausobre, as by far the most instruct-

His reputation, for some reputation he had, serves to show how low the human intellect had sunk in his age within the limits of the Western Empire.*

ive and agreeable of his companions, distinguished for his good sense and acuteness, his fertility of reference and readiness of combination, and for an alacrity of mind and an abundance of resources which are never exhausted by the difficulties of his subject.

* It may not be uninteresting to notice a few passages of Philaster; but I have no copy of his work at hand, except that published by De la Bigne, in the fifth volume of his "*Bibliotheca Patrum*" (Paris, 1575), to the columns of which I shall refer.

He says that the Samaritans derived their name from a king Samarus; or, as others said, from a son of Canaan of that name (col. 7); and that the Pagans and Greeks were so called after two kings, Paganus and Græcus, sons of Deucalion; for which he appeals to the authority of Hesiod (coll. 37, 38). He makes it a heresy to maintain that the number of years since the creation is uncertain (col. 38); but he was himself so ignorant of chronology, as to affirm, that at the time when he wrote more than four hundred years had elapsed since the birth of Christ (col. 34), though he died before the conclusion of the fourth century. He reckons twenty-eight heresies of the Jews before Christ; and among them, worshippers of frogs, that is, the frogs which were one of the plagues of Egypt (col. 8); — worshippers of mice; the mice which devastated the land of Ashdod (1 Sam. v. 6, vi. 1, according to the Septuagint, and vi. 5), when the ark was taken by the Philistines (col. 8); — and worshippers of wells (*Puteorites, qui puteos colunt*), which heresy is founded by him on the passage of Jeremiah (ii. 13), "Me have they forsaken, the fountain of living water, and they have hewn out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (col. 9). Among these Jewish heretics he likewise reckons the Herodians, who, he says,

His work is, however, quoted as a main source of information on the subject by Au-

expect Herod, the king of the Jews, who was smitten by an angel (Acts xii. 23), as the Messiah (col. 12). In this story one may suspect that he confounded the Herod of whom he speaks with his grandfather, Herod the Great; for Epiphanius (*Hæres.* XX: Opp. I. 45), with no more truth, but with a little less absurdity, than Philaster, pretends that the Herodians believed that Herod the Great was the Messiah.

It is to be observed, that in enumerating his heresies, of which he reckons one hundred and twenty since Christ, he uses the word "heresy" in two senses, in the one to denote an heretical sect, and in the other an heretical opinion. It is a heresy, according to him, to hold that earthquakes are produced by natural causes and not by the wrath of God (col. 32); — to maintain that Christians were posterior to Jews and Pagans, there having been Christians in faith and life, who were believers in the Trinity, from Adam to Moses (col. 36); — to deny that all the Psalms were written by David (col. 46); — and not to interpret allegorically the account of Solomon's wives and concubines (col. 57).

"It is a heresy," he says, "to believe that the stars are fixed in heaven, and do not every evening suddenly come forth from hidden treasure-houses disposed by God, at his command" (col. 48). One might here question whether he had not mistaken the meaning of Philaster, did he not proceed to enlarge upon his conception, so as to leave no doubt concerning it.

Others of his heresies are curious, as giving a view of the opinions and practices of his time; but on these it would be foreign from our purpose to dwell. I will only mention, that one is of those who used water instead of wine in the sacrament (col. 23); — another, of those who ascribed the Epistle to the Hebrews to any author but St. Paul (col. 27); — and a third, of the followers of a certain Rhetorius (col. 28), who, he says, praised all heresies, and said that they were all true ("qui omnes laudabat hæreses, dicens omnes bene sentire, et neminem errare ex eis"). This,

gustine, who has left a name indelibly impressed on the history of the world; and who, in the first half of the fifth century, likewise wrote on heretics. But his "Catalogue of Heresies," * as it is entitled, is merely a synopsis, apparently a hasty production, composed without any critical inquiry. It is of no authority, containing little which is not taken from Epiphanius or Philaster; and it even appears that he was ignorant of the existence of the whole work of Epiphanius. His description of the book which he used is applicable only to an epitome of it.† He probably consulted some manuscript which contained in a Latin translation (for he was ignorant of Greek) only the synopses that Epiphanius has prefixed to the different divisions of his work. It is evident that he did not write

Augustine, who quotes the account in his own "Catalogue of Heresies," says is so absurd, that it appears to him incredible. A like doctrine, however, has found favor in other times than those of Philaster. Even in our own age it has been taught, that in all systems of philosophy or religion there is a foundation or nucleus of essential truth. Thus, for example, Baur, in his work which I have formerly mentioned, says, — "All religions agree in the *Idea* of religion. To that they have the relation of the appearance and form to the substance, of the concrete to the abstract, of the derived to the immediate." p. 21.

* It is contained in the sixth volume of the Basil edition of his works, published in 1569.

† *Ibid.* col. 10.

from any personal knowledge of Gnostics as existing in his time.

IN the fifth century, likewise, Theodoret, who holds a high rank among the later Greek fathers, composed a treatise on the heretics, in five books ; * the first three of which relate to those whom he calls ancient heretics, the Gnostics and the Manichæans ; — the Ebionites, and those who believed with them that Christ was only a man ; — and some others, whom he ranks with neither class. Concerning these ancient heretics he professes to have compiled his information from older writers, Justin Martyr, Iræneus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius, the ecclesiastical historian, Eusebius of Emesa, Adamantius (the author of the Dialogue *de Rectâ Fide*), and others of less note, whose works are lost. It is, perhaps, a proof of his good sense, that he does not name Epiphanius as an authority. He speaks of the ancient sects, preceding the time of Arius, as being for the most part extinct ; and apprehends that he may be blamed by some for having “ brought them again from the darkness of oblivion into

* *Hæreticarum Fabularum Compendium*, in the fourth volume of Sirmond's edition of his works.

the light of memory." * He says, that God, permitting the evil seed to be sown, had turned the greater part of the tares into wheat, so that most places were free from the Gnostic heresies; the remaining disciples of Valentinus and of Marcion, and likewise the Manichæans, being few, easily numbered, and thinly scattered in certain cities.† In various places he expresses himself to the same effect. The ancient heresies, he informs us, had passed out of notice; they had either been "rooted up, or remained like half-withered trees in a few cities and villages." ‡

* Epist. Præfat. ad Sporacium, pp. 188, 189.

† Heret. Fab. Lib. II. Præfat. p. 218.

‡ Lib. III. Præfat. p. 226. Lib. III. (*ad finem*) p. 132. Lib. IV. Præfat. p. 232. — Certain assertions, however, in the Epistles of Theodoret may appear, at first sight, irreconcilable with those quoted above. In one place (Epist. lxxxi. Opp. III. P. II. p. 954), he says he had converted the inhabitants of eight villages, together with those of the neighbouring country, from the heresy of Marcion, and brought them over willingly to the truth (*ἀσμάτας [τὰς κώμας] πρὸς τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐποδήγησα*); — in another (Epist. cxiii. pp. 986, 987), that during the twenty-six years he had been bishop, he had "delivered more than a thousand souls from the disease of Marcion"; adding, that all heresy was thoroughly extirpated from the churches under his charge; — and in a third (Epist. cxlv. p. 1026), that by his controversial writings against them, he had made orthodox Christians of more than a myriad of Marcionites; which of course may be considered as an extravagant rhetorical amplification. It is an obvious remark, that a sect must have been already falling to pieces, from which con-

BESIDE the writers who have been mentioned, and of whose respective authority it has been my purpose to give some estimate, there are notices of the Gnostics, though not of much

verts were made so readily. It is probable, likewise, that Theodoret, who in these Epistles is defending himself against his enemies, and enumerating his services and labors as bishop, not only exaggerated in the estimate of numbers, but applied the name Marcionite very loosely. The remains of the Marcionites, however, from the more simple doctrines and stricter morality and discipline of the sect, were likely to survive those of the other Gnostics.

Another passage of one of Theodoret's Epistles has been referred to (Priestley's History of Early Opinions, Vol. I. p. 148), as proving that the Gnostics were reviving in his time. But the passage has been misunderstood. Theodoret says, — "Those who, at the present time, have renewed the heresy of Marcion and Valentinus, and Manes, and the other Docetæ, being angry with me for publicly exposing their heresy, have endeavoured to deceive the Emperor." (Epist. lxxxii. p. 955.) He is here speaking, not of any proper Gnostics, but of his enemies, the Eutychians, at that time the dominant party in the Church. With reference to their opinions respecting the person of Christ, he elsewhere describes them as endeavouring to plant anew the heresy of Valentinus and Bardesanes, which had been rooted out. (Epist. cxlv. p. 1024.) In his work on Heresies, likewise, he says, that Satan, by means of "the miserable Eutyches, had caused the heresy of Valentinus, withered long ago, to flower again." (Hæret. Fab. Lib. IV. n. 13. Opp. IV. 246.)

These passages illustrate the loose manner in which the names of ancient Gnostic sects were applied in later times, and serve to show that they were sometimes used as mere terms of reproach toward those who were regarded as coinciding with the Gnostics in some one of their opinions. A similar use of opprobrious appellations has at all times been common.

value, in Eusebius's Ecclesiastical History ; and some information concerning them is scattered, here and there, in the writings of other later fathers. But, in general, it is little to be relied on.

IN addition, likewise, to the notices of them by Christian writers, we find that they had attracted the attention of the heathen opponents of Christianity. Celsus brought forward, as objections to Christianity, their real or pretended doctrines, in his work which was answered by Origen. In one place, as quoted by Origen,* he says, — " Let no one think me ignorant that some of the Christians agree that their God is the same with the God of the Jews, while others maintain one opposite to him, from whom they say that the Son came."

In the third century, Gnostics, and individuals holding some of the fundamental doctrines of the Gnostics, were made a subject of remark by the later Platonists, Plotinus and Porphyry. After the death of Plotinus, Porphyry reduced into some form and gave some finish to the crude mass of his writings, which he had left unpublished, and prefixed to them an account

* Cont. Cels. Lib. V. n. 61. Opp. I. 624.

of his life. In this account he says, that there were in the time of Plotinus many Christians, and other sectaries, drawn away from the ancient philosophy, the followers of Adelphius and Acylinus,* two individuals of whom we have no further knowledge. These sectaries used the works of writers whose names Porphyry gives, but of whom nothing now remains except their names. They likewise, he states, had books entitled Revelations, ascribed to Zoroaster† and others. "Being," he says, "deceived themselves, they deceived many, pretending that Plato had not penetrated to the depth of the essence of *intelligibles*." Plotinus, he informs us, had written a treatise concerning them, which he, in his arrangement of Plotinus's

* Γεγόνاسι δὲ κατ' αὐτὸν τῶν Χριστιανῶν πολλοὶ μὲν, καὶ ἄλλοι αἰρετικοὶ δὲ, ἐκ τῆς παλαιᾶς φιλοσοφίας ἀπηγμένοι, οἱ περὶ τὸν Ἀδελφίον, καὶ Ἀκυλίον, οἱ πολλοὺς ἐξηπάτων. Plotini Vit. apud Opp. a Ficino. (The pages of the Life in this edition are not numbered.) I quote the original of the passage, because it has been differently understood. The uncommon name Acylinus has been supposed to be an error of transcription; but we have no good ground for substituting any other.

† Many spurious works were about this time ascribed to Zoroaster. Of these his "Oracles" alone are, in part, extant. They may be found at the end of Stanley's "History of Philosophy." But they are not the work referred to above. They contain nothing peculiarly Gnostic, but are conformed to the doctrines of the later Platonists, and quoted with admiration by Proclus, and other writers of that school.

works, had entitled "Against the Gnostics." * But in the manuscripts of this treatise there is found another title, more precise and appropriate, which describes it as "Against those who affirm that the World and its Maker are Bad." Porphyry says, that he had himself proved at length, that the work ascribed to Zoroaster was spurious, having been lately fabricated by those sectaries.† It may be remarked, that Clement of Alexandria says, that the followers of Prodicus, a most immoral sect of pseudo-Gnostics, boasted of possessing the secret writings of Zoroaster.‡

Plotinus, in the tract referred to, represents those against whom he is writing as believing that the sensible universe was badly formed by an imperfect and erring power, sinking downward, as it were, with failing wings.§ He himself taught that it was eternal, without beginning or end. He refers particularly to doctrines concerning its formation, coincident with those ascribed to the Valentinians by Irenæus,|| which will be hereafter explained. In reference to the

* Now forming the ninth book of the second Ennead of his Works, p. 199, seqq.

† Plotini Vita, ubi sup.

‡ Stromat. I. § 15. p. 357.

§ Cont. Gnost. § 4. p. 202, passim.

|| Ibid. § 4. p. 202. § 10. p. 209.

doctrine of the Gnostics concerning *Æons*, or hypostatized attributes and ideas, emanant from God, and belonging to the totality of his nature, he objects, that, under pretence of investigating more accurately, they so divided the *intelligible* nature into this multitude of beings as to make it like the sensible. The division, he says, should be as small as possible, into not more than three * (the trinity of the later Platonists). He dwells upon their blaming the constitution and government of the world.† He speaks of their hating the body.‡ He says, that they used magical arts.§ And he represents their doctrines as strongly tending to produce bad morals.||

IN all this, so far as it goes, there is sufficient agreement with the representations of the fathers concerning the Gnostics. But there is no evidence that Plotinus was writing against Christian heretics. Nothing is said by him concerning that essential part of the scheme of the Gnostics which was founded on Christianity. The doctrines attacked by him might have been,

* Ibid. § 6. p. 204.

† Ibid. § 12. p. 211. § 15. p. 213, *passim*.

‡ Ibid. § 17. p. 215, *seqq.*

§ Ibid. § 14. p. 212.

|| Ibid. § 15. p. 213.

and probably were, all held by heathen speculators ; and to such there seems little doubt that he primarily referred. He nowhere uses the name of Gnostic or Christian in this discussion. He nowhere, throughout his writings, makes any direct and open attack on Christians, or expressly recognizes their existence. Thus leaving the great body of Christians unassailed, it is not likely that he would have entered into a labored controversy with heretics, disavowed by them, though claiming the Christian name, and not recognized as proper heathen philosophers, who consequently could hardly have been thought by him worthy of so much attention. There are doubtless in his tract "Against the Gnostics" positions asserted contrary to Christian truth, or to what was then the common belief of Christians ; as, for instance, he in one place expressly defends polytheism ;* and in another argues against ascribing diseases to the agency of demons ;† but this does not prove that the writer had Christian heretics particularly in view. In supporting his own philosophy, he could not but advance what was opposite to Christianity, and to the opinions of Christians. He speaks of those holding the doctrines against which he

* Cont. Gnost. § 9. p. 207.
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† Ibid. § 14. pp. 212, 213.

particularly wrote, as being, some of them, friends of his own, who had adopted those opinions before they became his friends.* If any Christian heretics had become friends of Plotinus, a circumstance very improbable, we can hardly doubt, that in controverting their peculiar doctrines, bearing throughout a relation to Christianity, he would have distinctly brought into view the fact of their being Christians. Porphyry says, that those against whom his master wrote were followers of Adelphius and Acylinus. Neither of these names, nor any that may plausibly be substituted for the latter of the two, if it be an error, is found anywhere in the writings of the fathers as that of the founder of a Gnostic sect. Nor is the use of any of the books, mentioned by Porphyry as current among the sectaries of whom he speaks, ascribed by the fathers to any of the Gnostics ; unless the Revelations of Zoroaster should be supposed an exception to this remark, on the ground of the statement of Clement, that the secret writings of Zoroaster were used by the followers of Prodicus. But the followers of Prodicus were not, I conceive, Christians.

We may, then, conclude that it was not

* Ibid. § 10. p. 209.

against proper Gnostics, that is, against Christian heretics, that Plotinus wrote, but against heathen speculatists, holding some of the leading doctrines of the Gnostics. Porphyry's enmity to the Christians probably led him to introduce the mention of them, when speaking of this tract of Plotinus, which bears of course against the doctrines controverted in it, by whomever held. In a following chapter, I shall endeavour to show that there were sects not Christian who were confounded with the Christian Gnostics. But I do not suppose such to have been the case in regard to the individuals whom Plotinus had particularly in view. They, I conceive, were acknowledged Heathens, holding certain Gnostic doctrines. By the term "Gnostics," when strictly used, according to its early and its common application, we mean Christian heretics, who, by being Christians, are sufficiently distinguished from all others with whose principles their own were partly coincident. But we may use the name more loosely to denote individuals, not Christians, who agreed with the Gnostics in their fundamental doctrine of the bad formation and ill-government of the universe by an inferior power or powers; and may thus speak of pseudo-Christian and of heathen Gnostics. It was

against heathen Gnostics, that the work of Plotinus seems to have been primarily directed.

THUS we have seen from what writers our information concerning the history of the Gnostics is to be derived, and how their respective authority is to be estimated. If the views that have been taken are correct, it is clear that these writers are not to be adduced indiscriminately. We cannot gain a correct knowledge of the Gnostics from a modern account, in which the statements of Epiphanius, Philaster, Augustine, and Theodoret are blended, as of equal value, with those of Irenæus, Clement, Tertullian, and Origen.

FROM what has been said we conclude that there are no distinct traces of the existence of Gnostic sects or systems during the first century. But before the middle of the second century the Gnostics became a well-recognized body, their most distinguished leaders appeared, and their opinions were formed into different systems. From the writers of this century and the next, to Origen inclusive, our principal authentic information concerning them is to be derived. At the same time, it is only with the opinions of the Gnostics of the first three cen-

turies concerning the genuineness of the Gospels that we are concerned. Those of the Gnostics of a later period require no particular investigation, and throw no light on the subject. In the latter part of the third century, the sect of the Manichæans arose, nearly allied to that of the Gnostics, but presenting a bolder and broader theory of the Universe, which cast into the shade the system of their predecessors. The names of ancient Gnostic sects, however, still remained in the fourth century, sometimes, we may believe, voluntarily assumed, and sometimes imposed as names of obloquy ; but it may be doubted, whether the tenets of the sects originally denoted by those names had not, in many cases, undergone great modifications among their reputed successors. By the writers of this century the Gnostics are, I think, generally treated of in a manner that implies rather their past existence than their actual prevalence. Their history became full of mistakes and falsehoods. From the third to the fifth century, they were probably dwindling away ; and in the fifth century, in the time of Theodoret, they seem, with the exception of some remaining Marcionites, nearly to have disappeared. Indeed, according to Gregory Nazianzen, they had ceased to disturb the church before the Arian controversy

arose, in the beginning of the fourth century. Speaking of the period immediately preceding, he says : * — “ There was a time when we had rest from heresies, when the Simonians and Marcionites, the Valentinians, the Basilidians, and the followers of Cerdo, the Cerinthians and Carpocratians, with all their idle and monstrous doctrines, their complete division of the God of All, and opposing of the Good God to the Creator, were swallowed up in their own AByss, and given over to SILENCE.” In the last clause there is a play upon words ; *Βυθός*, the *Depth*, or the *Abyss*, being the name given by the Valentinians to the Supreme Being, who was represented by them as having dwelt from eternity with the *Æon*, *Silence*.† After the quotation just made, Gregory speaks of the decline of other heresies extant in the third century ; and then says, — “ After a short interval, a new tempest rose against the church,” the Arian heresy. He does not represent the old heresies as ever reviving. The passage from which I have quoted is undoubtedly rhetorical and inexact ; but we can hardly infer less from it than

* Orat. XXIII. Opp. I. 414. Ed. Morelli.

† The same play upon words expressive of the same fact is in Theodoret ; Hæret. Fab. Lib. IV. Præfat. p. 232.

that the Gnostic heresy was dwindling away during the fourth century. In the Code of Justinian, however, among the edicts against heretics,* the names of ancient Gnostic sects occur ; but how far those to whom they were applied resembled the Gnostics of the second and third centuries, may appear, from what has been before said, to be very questionable.

RESPECTING the number of the Gnostics, at the time when they were most numerous, we have no means of approximating to any precise computation ; but many considerations show that it must have borne but a small proportion to that of the catholic Christians. The doctrines of the theosophic Gnostics were of such a nature, that they were little likely to be embraced except by men of a peculiar turn of mind, somewhat accustomed to the philosophical speculations of the age ; especially as the character of that age, and the external circumstances of Christians, did not favor the affectation of mysticism, or the pride of holding novel theories, among the unlearned. Ptolemy, the Valentini-an, in the beginning of his letter to Flora, before mentioned, says, that “not many have a

* Lib. I. Tit. 5.

right apprehension of the Law given by Moses," — meaning, that not many adopted the Gnostic opinions concerning it. The followers of Basilides affirmed, according to Irenæus, that "few could understand their mysteries, one only in a thousand, and two in ten thousand"; and added, "that the Jews had ceased to be, but Christians were not as yet."* In the *Doctrina Orientalis*,† Theodotus, or some other Gnostic, referring to a division of men into three classes, made by the Valentinians, says, that "the earthy are numerous, the *rational* ‡ [which class included common Christians] are not numerous, and the spiritual [the Gnostics] are rare."§ These statements correspond to the common representation of the theosophic Gnostics, that their peculiar doctrines were the esoteric doctrines of Christianity, which had been privately handed down to those capable of receiving them.

What has been said applies more particularly to the theosophic Gnostics. As regards the Marcionites, they were distinguished for their abstinence from worldly pleasures. Marriage was not tolerated among them. Those united by it were obliged to separate, on becoming

* Contra Hæres. Lib. I. c. 24. § 6. p. 102.

† See before, p. 94, note *.

§ Doctrina Orientalis, § 56. p. 983.

‡ Οἱ ψυχικοί.

members of their community.* Their bold doctrines were opposed without disguise to the common belief, and to the plain language of the Gospels, and were little likely to be received except by individuals possessed of more than usual hardihood of mind. In the practice of their self-denying virtues or extravagances, they were not encouraged, as others have been, by popular admiration. On the contrary, they were objects of odium. They had no external support but from among themselves. They were rejected by the catholic Christians as heretics, and by the Heathens they were perse-

* Clement. Al. Stromat. III. § 3. p. 515, seq. § 4. p. 522. § 5. p. 529. § 6. p. 531, seqq. Tertullian. Advers. Marcion. Lib. I. c. 29. pp. 380, 381. Lib. IV. c. 11. p. 422. c. 23. p. 438. c. 34. p. 450 (where, in Le Prieur's edition (at C), *later* is a misprint for *latere*, and for "*nunc conjungens*," we should read "*non conjungens*"). Lib. V. c. 7. p. 469. c. 15. p. 480. I refer to these numerous passages, because it has been doubted whether Marcion extended his prohibition of marriage to all his followers. I can perceive no proper ground for the supposition that has been maintained in various forms, that they were divided into two classes, and that this prohibition was binding only on the higher class. From a single passage of Tertullian already referred to (Advers. Marcion. p. 469), — "*Marcion totum concubitum auferens fidelibus (viderint enim catechumeni ejus),*" — it may indeed be inferred that the prohibition of the marriage state was not extended to catechumens, that is, to those aspiring to be members of the sect, and receiving instruction. But nothing more than this, I think, appears.

cuted as Christians. They were very conscientious, but very erroneous believers. Such a sect we must suppose to have been small, compared with the catholic Christians; though there is some ground for believing that its number was nearly or quite equal to that of all the other Gnostics.

The fact, that the different sects of Gnostics insensibly melted away at so early a period, and the further fact, that their doctrines had so little influence upon the belief of subsequent Christians, likewise afford proof that they formed only a small part of the whole Christian body. The same inference may be drawn from the manner in which they were treated by the early fathers, who manifest no alarm at their growth, nor fear of their prevalence, but who write concerning them in a tone of undoubting superiority. It may be further observed, that the early fathers, in the passages in which they speak of the multitude of Christians who had spread through the world, neither except nor include the Gnostics, but appear not to have had them in mind, though they certainly did not consider them as belonging to the Church, or, in other words, to the great body of proper Christians. In the passages, likewise, in which they speak of the unity of faith in the Church, their modes of expression

imply that the Gnostics bore but a small proportion to the catholic Christians. "The Church," says Irenæus, "though scattered over the whole world, carefully preserves the faith derived from the Apostles and their disciples, as if it were but a single family in one house. It speaks as with one mouth. For, various as are the languages of the world, the essential doctrine is one and the same. No different belief has been held or taught by the churches founded in Germany, nor by those in Spain, nor in Gaul, nor in the East, nor in Egypt, nor in Libya, nor by those founded in the middle of the world [Judea]. But as the sun, the creature of God, in every part of the world is one and the same, so the preaching of the truth shines everywhere, and enlightens all who are desirous of knowing the truth."* Language such as this could hardly have been used, if there had been a large body of professed Christians who rejected the doctrines of the Church.

HERE, then, we conclude what may be called the external history of the Gnostics. In the next chapter, we shall speak of their moral characteristics, in connection with their imperfect knowledge of Christianity.

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. I. c. 10. § 2. p. 49. conf. § 1. p. 48.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE MORALS OF THE Gnostics, AND THEIR IMPERFECT CONCEPTIONS OF CHRISTIANITY.

WHEN, in the second century, after an interval of obscurity following the times of the Apostles, the catholic Christians appear distinctly in view, we find them distinguished, as a body, by their abhorrence of the vices of the heathen world, by a high and stern morality, by the strictness of the discipline which respective churches exercised over their members, by a general tendency to the virtues of the ascetic and the martyr, and by Christian faith, the conviction of the reality of the unseen and the future, controlling the sense of present pleasures and sufferings. In this character the Marcionites appear to have shared; but what was the state of morals among the theosophic Gnostics is a question less easy to decide.

Clement of Alexandria divides the heretics into two classes. "They either teach men," he says, "to lead a loose life, or, with overstrained severity, they preach continence through impiety

and enmity";* — that is, as Clement meant, enmity towards the Creator. In his view, the latter class included the Marcionites, and some ascetics among the other Gnostics, to all of whom the name of *Encratites*† was given. They taught that it was not right to marry and bring children into this imperfect and unhappy world; and, regarding the body as evil, considered the pleasures of the senses as sinful. In consequence, Clement ascribes their principles to enmity to the Creator. "Through opposition to the Creator," he says, "Marcion rejected the use of the things of this world."‡ A similar account of the self-denial of the Encratites, and of its cause, is given by Irenæus.§ To the strict morals of the Marcionites Tertullian bears indirect but decisive testimony. He is speaking of their doctrine, that while the Creator was *just*, and inflicted punishment, the Supreme God, their God, was *good*, and not to be feared. "Come now," he says, with his usual force of expression, though the sentiment is incorrect, "you who do not fear God, because he is good,

* Stromat. III. § 5. p. 539, seqq. Conf. §§ 3, 4. p. 515, seqq.

† From the Greek *ἐγκρατής*, "practising self-command," "continent."

‡ Stromat. III. § 4. p. 532.

§ Cont. Hæres. Lib. I. c. 28. § 1. pp. 106, 107.

why do you not indulge in every lust, the chief gratification of life, as far as I know, to all who do not fear God? Why not frequent the customary pleasures of the raging circus, the savage arena, and the lascivious theatre? Why, in times of persecution, do you not at once take the proffered censer,* and save your life by denying your faith? 'Far be it from me!' you say, 'Far be it from me!' You fear to offend, then, and thus you prove that you fear Him who forbids the offence."† Conformably to this, Origen speaks of the good morals of some of the heretics, as one means of drawing men over to their doctrines; and he states hypothetically the case of such a heretic, "either a Marcionite," he says, "or a disciple of Valentinus, or of any other sect."‡

But, generally, the accounts of the morals of the theosophic Gnostics are very unfavorable. According to the statements of Irenæus, the Valentinians, affirming themselves to be distinguished from others by their spiritual nature, which made a part of their original conforma-

* The censer was proffered, that the person accused of Christianity might offer incense to some idol, and thus refute the charge.

† *Advers. Marcion. Lib. I. c. 27. pp. 379, 380.*

‡ *Homil. in Ezechiel. VII. § 3. Opp. III. 382.*

tion, maintained that it was impossible they should not be saved, whatever they might do. They regarded the spiritual principle identified with them as incapable of pollution; and compared themselves to gold, which receives no injury from defilement. Hence the perfect among them, he affirms, practised without fear all that is forbidden. They ate idol-sacrifices, and celebrated the heathen festivals; some of them did not abstain from the shows of gladiators and the fights with wild beasts, "spectacles," says Iræneus, with the new feeling of a Christian concerning them, "hated by God and men"; and others were grossly licentious in their lives, seducing and corrupting women, by teaching them their principles.*

The erroneous doctrine, mentioned by Iræneus, concerning their spiritual nature, appears, in its essential features, to have been common to the Valentinians generally, and also to the other theosophic Gnostics,† but not the moral offences with which he charges them as its consequence; as may appear in part from the limiting words, "some," and "others," and "the

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. I. c. 6. p. 28, seqq.

† In addition to what has been quoted from Iræneus, see Clement. Al. Stromat. II. § 3. pp. 433, 434. § 20. p. 489. Stromat. V. § 1. p. 645.

perfect among them ” (used perhaps ironically), which he introduces into his account. Of the Valentinians and other theosophic Gnostics it is to be recollected, on the one hand, that they were Christians, and, on the other, that they were not rational Christians. As a sect, they entertained very erroneous views of our religion; and probably many of them had been very ill informed concerning it. Repelled, as they were, from the great body of believers, there is no reason to doubt that there were among them those whom the power of Christianity was not sufficient to withdraw from the evil influences of the Pagan world, by which they were surrounded; whose ties to it were far from being altogether broken; who still remained entangled among its corruptions. With some softening, perhaps, of such charges as those of Irenæus, we have no ground for questioning their applicability to a portion of the theosophic Gnostics; but, at the same time, we have evidence, to which we will now advert, that they were true only of a portion.

Clement of Alexandria, discoursing on self-restraint, quotes almost as an authority a passage from Valentinus. It begins thus:—“There is one who is good, who has openly manifested himself through his son, and through him alone

can the heart be made pure, every evil spirit being driven out of it." Valentinus compares the heart polluted by the indwelling of evil spirits to a caravansary injured and defiled by the strangers who lodge in it. "But," he says, "when the only good Father takes charge of it, it is made holy and enlightened, and thus he who has such a heart is *blessed, for he shall see God.*"* Tatian, who was distinguished for his asceticism, was, says Clement, of the school of Valentinus.† Heracleon, a distinguished Valentinian, is quoted by Clement, as teaching that the profession of faith required by Christ of his followers is not that made in words only, but that "made by works answering to faith in him."‡ And Ptolemy, who remodelled the system of his master, taught that the fasting enjoined by our Saviour was not bodily abstinence, but abstinence from all sin.§

Basilides and his followers formed another

* Stromat. II. § 20. pp. 488, 489. Valentinus, it will be perceived, alludes to the words of Christ,—"Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God."—The whole passage, as Clement remarks, does not seem easily reconcilable with the doctrine, that the spiritual are so by natural constitution, and are, in consequence, assured of salvation.

† Stromat. III. § 13. p. 553. ‡ Stromat. IV. § 9. p. 595.

§ Epist. ad Floram. Apud Irenæi Opp. p. 360.

branch of the theosophic Gnostics, nearly allied to the Valentinians; and Irenæus brings similar charges of immorality against them.* But Clement begins the third book of his *Stromata* with quoting two passages, one from Basilides, and the other from his son Isidore, and then proceeds to say, — “I have adduced these words for the reproof of those Basilidians who live not as they ought, as if through their Perfectness they were free to sin, or as if, though they should now sin, they would be saved by nature through their innate election; for the founders of their doctrines give them no license so to act.”† Thus Clement, writing with less prejudice, corrects, and at the same time confirms in part, the accounts of Irenæus.

BUT against certain sects and individuals Clement himself brings the gravest charges of immorality, so deep-seated as thoroughly to corrupt their principles. “I have fallen in with a sect,” he says, “whose leader affirmed that we must fight with pleasure by the use of pleasure; this genuine Gnostic, for he called himself a Gnostic, thus deserting to pleasure under the

* *Cont. Hæres. Lib. I. c. 24. § 5. p. 102. c. 26. § 2. p. 107.*

† *Stromat. III. § 1. p. 510.*

pretence of warring against it."* He then mentions others, who perverted (one can hardly think seriously) the ascetic maxim, "that the body must be abused," and employed it to justify themselves in the most licentious indulgences.† In another place, he speaks of an individual named Prodicus, and of his followers. "They affirm," says Clement, "that by nature they are sons of the First God; that, using the privilege of their birth and freedom, they live as they choose, and that they choose to live in pleasure. They think that they are under no control, as *lords of the Sabbath*, and born superior to every other race, royal children; for a king, they say, is circumscribed by no law."‡ They taught that there was no obligation to pray.§ Speaking of sectaries of a like kind, Clement also says, that there were "some who called intercourse with common women a mystical communion; doing outrage to the name." "They consecrate such licentiousness," he says, "and think that it conducts them to the kingdom of God."|| The charge of teaching that gross licentiousness was a

* Stromat. II. § 20. p. 490.

† Ibid. pp. 490, 491. Conf. Stromat. III. § 4. pp. 522, 523.

‡ Stromat. III. § 4. p. 525.

§ Stromat. VII. § 7. p. 854.

|| Stromat. III. § 4. pp. 523, 524.

necessary means of liberating the soul from its entanglement in matter, and consequently was a religious duty, is likewise brought by Irenæus against the Carpocratians, a sect to be hereafter mentioned.

Clement also speaks of individuals, called *Antitactæ* (Opponents), whom he describes as maintaining that "the God of All is our Father by nature, and that all which he made is good; but that one of those produced by him sowed tares, and gave birth to evils, in which he involved us, opposing us to the Father; whence, to avenge the Father, we, they say, oppose him, doing contrary to his will. Since, therefore, he said, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery,' we commit adultery, to break his command."* The giver of the Law, it seems, was, in their view, the Devil. Ptolemy, the Valentinian, likewise speaks of some who referred the origin of the Jewish Law to the Devil; but he says that they also ascribed to him the creation of the world;† which does not appear to have been true of the persons mentioned by Clement. These, it would seem, pretended to be in some sort Christians; for Clement, in reasoning against them, implies that they affirmed, that

* Stromat. III. § 4. pp. 596, 597.

† Epist. ad Floram, pp. 357, 358.

“the Saviour only was to be obeyed”;* the comparison evidently being between him and the giver of the Law.

There is a passage of the later Platonist, Porphyry, descriptive of individuals resembling some of those spoken of by Clement, in their pretensions and in their licentious principles. It is in his work in which he defends the Pythagorean doctrine of abstinence from animal food. “The opinion,” he says, “that one yielding to the affections of the senses can employ his powers about the objects of intellect, has been the ruin of many of the barbarians,” by which term he means those whose religion and philosophy were not Grecian. “They have arrogantly,” he continues, “indulged in every form of pleasure ; saying, that he who is conversant with other things may grant such license to the irrational part of his nature.” They compared themselves to the ocean, which is undefiled by the pollutions that rivers are continually carrying into it. All things, they said, must be subjected to us. A small body of water is easily made turbid by any impurity ; and so it is in regard to food (the particular subject of discussion) with men of little minds.

* Stromat. III. § 4. p. 527.

But where there is a depth of power, men receive all things and are defiled by nothing. "Thus deceiving themselves," says Porphyry, "they act conformably to their error; and, instead of enjoying liberty, throw themselves into a gulf of misery in which they perish."*

The individuals spoken of by Porphyry were, it appears, ready to admit that men of little minds were corrupted by sensual indulgences. So the theosophic Gnostics, according to Irenæus, affirmed, that, while they were altogether secure of salvation, as being naturally spiritual, common Christians, who were not so, must attain salvation through good works and a simple faith, — simple faith, in contradistinction to that perfect knowledge of spiritual things which they themselves possessed.†

* De Abstinentiâ ab Animalibus necandis, Lib. I. § 49. — It may be observed, that this work is addressed to an acquaintance, who had fallen away from the Pythagorean doctrine, and that, in appealing to him, Porphyry has the following allusion to Christians: — "I would not intimate, that your nature is inferior to that of some ignorant persons, who, embracing rules of conduct contrary to those of their former life, submit to be cut limb from limb (*τομὰς τε μολὼν ὑπομένοντες*); and abhor, more than human flesh, certain kinds of animal food in which before they indulged." Lib. I. § 2. He refers, I suppose, to the abstinence of Christians from the flesh of idol-sacrifices, and the other kinds of food prohibited by the council at Jerusalem: Acts xv. 28, 29.

† Cont. Hæres. Lib. I. c. 6. § 2. p. 29. § 4. p. 31.

There can be no doubt, I think, that the doctrine, held by the theosophic Gnostics, concerning the spiritual and incorruptible nature of a favored portion of mankind, was abused by certain individuals, and connected with the grossest immorality, as is represented by Clement and Porphyry. But I do not conceive that the individuals of whom they speak were Christian heretics. The supposition of any serious or intelligent belief of the divine mission of Christ is wholly inconsistent with the extreme licentiousness of their principles and practice. So far as they were at all connected with Christianity, we may suppose that they had learnt something concerning it, perhaps through the medium of the Gnostics; and that such was the character of their minds, that they were very ready to break through their old restraints, to treat with contempt the Pagan mythology, to regard themselves as specially illuminated, and to form their crude conceptions into principles that might sanction their licentiousness, as the privilege of their new liberty and their spiritual nature. Sects and individuals of this class may be denominated *pseudo-Christian*, a name to be understood as distinguishing them, on the one hand, from the Christian heretics, and, on the other, from those heathen Gnostics

on whom the influence of Christianity, if any, was more remote. Each of the three classes, however, probably passed into that nearest to it by insensible gradations. Of the pseudo-Christian sects I shall speak in the next chapter ; and will only here observe, that, taking the name *heathen*, not in the distinguishing sense just mentioned, but in the extent of its meaning, these pseudo-Christians may properly be called Heathens.

As regards the theosophic Gnostics, we have seen that a portion of them were ascetics, as well as the Marcionites ; and that immorality was far from being taught or countenanced by the more distinguished of their number. But many of them, a portion so large as, in the minds of some writers, to give, whether fairly or not, a character to the whole, were but partially separated from the heathen world. They joined in its idol-sacrifices, and shared in its licentiousness. The charges brought against them by Irenæus are confirmed, as we have seen, by Clement, as regards one of the two classes into which he divides the heretics. They correspond to the representations of Tertullian. And, at a still earlier period, Justin Martyr, in his Dialogue with Trypho, introduces Trypho as saying, that “ he had learnt

that many of those who said that they professed Jesus, and who were called Christians, ate idol-sacrifices," that is, joined in the rites of Pagan worship, "saying that they were nothing hurt by it." * They justified themselves in their practices by doctrines common to the theosophic Gnostics, which admitted of an easy perversion to the purpose. It is probable, however, that some of them laid little or no stress on the incorruptibility of their spiritual nature; but merely said, as Irenæus states in one passage, that "God did not care much for those things."†

But any approach to idolatry is so contrary to the fundamental doctrine of our religion, and the grosser sensual vices stand in such manifest opposition to the spirituality required by it, and to its express prohibitions, that they would seem to be among the last offences that one believing himself a Christian might imagine to be countenanced or permitted by Christianity. The case of those Gnostics we have been considering presents, therefore, a remarkable phenomenon. But it is one which may be explained, and its existence, consequently, be confirmed, by considerations drawn from the antecedent

* Dial. cum Tryph. p. 207.

† — "non valde hæc curare dicentes Deum." Lib. I. c. 28. § 2. p. 107.

history of Christianity, and the state of the ancient world. To these we will now attend.

FROM the New Testament we learn how imperfectly some of the first Gentile converts comprehended the undivided worship to be paid to the Supreme Being, and the purity of life which Christianity requires. They, like the looser Gnostics of later times, were guilty of licentiousness and of joining in idolatrous rites. "Some," says St. Paul to the Corinthians, "being accustomed to the idol, eat even till now as of an idol-sacrifice";* and he thus exhorts them, referring to the ancient Israelites: — "Be not ye idolaters as were some of them, as is written, *The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to sport.* Nor let us commit fornication, as did some of them, of whom three and twenty thousand fell in one day."† The latter exhortation seems to have been thus intimately connected with the former, because debauchery was so common a part, or an accompaniment, of the religious festivals and rites of the Heathens. As regards idol-sacrifices, it appears that some of

* 1 Cor. viii. 7. I read *συνθελίq*, not (as in the Received Text) *συνειδήσει*. But which is the true reading is doubtful, and to the present purpose unimportant.

† 1 Cor. x. 7, 8.

the Corinthians thought, that, as "an idol was nothing in the world," they might, therefore, "sit at meat in an idol's temple"; that is, that they might join their former heathen associates in being present at a sacrifice there offered, and at the entertainment following it, when those portions of the victim which belonged to the offerer were eaten; — that they might, as St. Paul expresses it, "have communion with demons," and "partake both of the Lord's table and the table of demons."*

The early history of Christianity affords another remarkable indication of such errors as have been mentioned existing among its converts. When it was determined by the Apostles and Elders at Jerusalem to admit the Gentile converts as Christians to their communion, without their being previously circumcised, that is, without their first professing themselves proselytes to Judaism, they were specially enjoined to abstain from idol-sacrifices and from fornication. "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to impose upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: To abstain from idol-sacrifices, and from the eating of blood and of things strangled, and from fornication."† Noth-

* See 1 Cor. viii. 4, 10. x. 20, 21.

† Acts xv. 28, 29.

ing at first view may strike a modern reader more strangely than that the eating of idol-sacrifices and unchastity should be coupled in the same prohibition with actions morally indifferent in their nature. But I have referred to this decree (as it has been called), because it affords much light on the state of the early Christian community, in reference to the present subject. We will attend to both parts of it, as their connection requires, though only that relating to idolatry and licentiousness is to our immediate purpose.

To explain it, then, two considerations are to be attended to; the prejudices of the Jewish, and the erroneous sentiments and habits of the Gentile, converts. The result of the deliberations of the council was "after much discussion,"* in which those who opposed the admission of the Gentile converts into the church, unless they first became proselytes to Judaism and assumed the observance of the whole Jewish Law, had, we may presume, particularly urged against them the commission of the acts specially prohibited. Why the eating of blood and of things strangled should have given strong offence to those who were zealous for the Law

* Acts xv. 7.

may appear from the fact, that the command to abstain from them is expressly extended in the Law to strangers sojourning among the Israelites.* It is also represented in Genesis as a universal precept, given by God to Noah and his descendants;† and may, therefore, have been regarded, even by many of those Jews who were most liberally disposed, as binding upon all men. It is next to be remarked, that many of the Gentile converts, as it appears, had no correct moral feeling of the offence either of joining a feast in honor of an idol, or of unchastity. At such feasts they had been accustomed to be present, and seeing that they knew, as the Corinthians boasted, "that an idol was nothing in the world,"‡ they saw no harm to themselves or others in continuing to enjoy the gratification. As for simple unchastity, it had not been considered by the generality of Heathens as a mat-

* Leviticus xvii. 10 - 13.

† Genesis ix. 4.

‡ St. Paul (1 Cor. viii. 1, seqq.) refers to such a boast ironically, with reference to the misapplication which the Corinthians had made of their knowledge: — "Concerning idol-sacrifices we know; — for we all have knowledge; knowledge puffs up, but love edifies; he who thinks he knows something knows nothing yet as it ought to be known; but he who loves God has been taught by him; — concerning the eating of idol-sacrifices, then, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one."

ter of reproach, except in the female sex. Amid the prevalence of more odious vices, and the general disrespect for woman, it was lightly thought of by the wisest and best among them, and was either permitted by their moralists and philosophers, or scarcely came within their view as any thing to be reprehended. Thus, while, on the one hand, the strong conscientious prejudices of probably far the greater part of the Jewish believers required the prohibition of eating "flesh with the life thereof, which is its blood";* so, on the other hand, the imperfect notions of religion and morality which the Gentile converts brought with them made it necessary to insist particularly on the graver offences specified, and explicitly to announce that they were forbidden by Christianity. But the same influences that corrupted the imperfect faith of some of the earliest Gentile converts continued to operate in the second century on the imperfect faith of many of the theosophic Gnostics; nor is there, as some have suggested, any reason to regard those charges as unjust or improbable, when made against a considerable portion of their number, which we know to be true as respects a portion of the professed converts of the Apostolic age.

* Genesis ix. 4.

BUT the influence of heathen principles and practice was not the only source of moral error. Even Christian truths, viewed in relation to the circumstances of the times, were liable to be grossly misrepresented and abused ; and sometimes the strong words in which they are expressed by St. Paul were so perverted, as to make them contradict the whole tenor of his doctrine. "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,"* said the Apostle in one of the noblest declarations ever uttered. "The creation itself will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God."† "Stand fast in the liberty with which Christ has made you free."‡ The liberty of which St. Paul speaks was that enlargement of mind produced by Christianity, through new conceptions of duty and of God ; liberty from the narrow and bitter prejudices of the Jews, and from the burdensome ritual of their Law, which, according to a remarkable expression of St. Peter, was "a yoke that neither they nor their fathers had been able to bear";§ and liberty, on the other hand, from heathen superstition, its sanctified follies, its idle terrors, its abominable rites, and its slavery to gods

* 2 Cor. iii. 17.

† Galatians v. 1.

‡ Romans viii. 21.

§ Acts xv. 10.

whose characters were only a source of moral pollution; that system from which Lucretius thought atheism a happy deliverance :—

*“ Humana arte oculos fide quom vita jaceat
In terris oppressa gravi sub religione.”*

The liberty of which the Apostle spoke was freedom from all those hard and degrading observances and supposititious duties, “that servitude to the weak and beggarly principles of the world,”* through which men have sought the favor of the being or beings whom they have worshipped, in the neglect of moral goodness. It was freedom from “that spirit of bondage and fear” with which the Jews regarded God, and the reception of the Christian spirit, which “bears witness to our spirits that we are children of God.”† In a word, it was freedom from superstition and sin.

This state of mind, this liberty, was to be attained through faith, by becoming a Christian, that is, through the hearty and practical reception of Christian truth. The favor of God was not, as the unbelieving Jews maintained, to be secured by “the works of the Law”; that is, by the observance of the Jewish Law, according to their notions of what constituted its observ-

* Τὰ ἀσθενῆ καὶ πτωχὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου. Gal. iv. 3, 9.

† Romans viii. 14, 15.

ance, namely, a strict regard to all its *peculiar* requirements and religious rites. Such observance was so far from being the duty of a Christian, as some of the Jewish believers maintained, that the new convert would wholly mistake the character of his religion, if he suffered himself to be persuaded that it was an essential means of obtaining God's favor.* It would be seeking "for completion in the flesh, after having begun in the spirit."† "I tell you," says the Apostle, "ye who seek for righteousness by the Law have done with Christ; ye have fallen away from the dispensation of favor."‡ To have faith, to be a Christian, was all that was required; and "the works of the Law," in the sense in which that term was used by the unbelieving Jews and bigoted Jewish converts, were not required.

But further than this, the blessings which believers enjoyed were not conferred in consequence of any previous merit of theirs, of *any* works which they had performed, nor of any claim upon God, such as the Jews believed themselves to have established by keeping their Law. They were his free gift to a world lying

* See the Epistle to the Galatians.

† Ibid. iii. 3.

‡ Ibid. v. 4.

in sin. They were offered equally to the tax-gatherer and to the harlot, as to him who was, or fancied himself, righteous. It was not the goodness of men which had entitled them to this new dispensation of favor ; it was their sinfulness and misery which had called for this interposition of mercy ; “ and now to him,” says the Apostle, “ performing no works ” (that is, to him who had performed no works), “ but having faith in God, who receives the sinner to his favor, his faith is accounted righteousness.”* His sins were forgiven upon his becoming a Christian ; for the first duty of a Christian was reformation ; and reformation is the only ground of the forgiveness of sin.

Such were the truths maintained by St. Paul. But the bold, brief, unlimited, unguarded language, in which they were occasionally expressed by him, admitted of being misinterpreted in a manner contradictory to the whole spirit of his teaching, and to the fundamental requirements of Christianity. We perceive that he sometimes apprehended that his doctrine might be so perverted. “ Brethren,” he says to the Galatians, “ ye have been called to liberty, only use not your liberty as a pretence for the flesh ” ; that is,

* Romans iv. 5.

as a pretence for the indulgence of sinful appetites and passions.* St. Peter, likewise, exhorts that Christians should conduct themselves as "free, and not using their freedom as a cloak for wickedness, but as servants of God."† After strongly stating that the pardon of sin was tendered to all by Christianity, St. Paul asks, with reference probably both to the misrepresentations of the unbelieving Jews, and the loose notions of some Christian converts, — "What then shall we say? Shall we continue in sin that the favor may superabound?"‡ and earnestly rejects this false inference. How St. Paul's doctrine concerning "works" was abused, we learn from the Epistle ascribed to St. James.§ It is evident that there were those who thought that to become a Christian, in a loose sense of the word, was all that was required, who had false notions of Christian liberty and of the pardon of sin, and who comprehended the moral duties among the works from which their faith absolved them.

GREAT changes in the religious opinions and

* Galatians, v. 13. Comp. vv. 19–21, where the Apostle enumerates the works of the flesh.

† 1 Peter ii. 16.

‡ Romans vi. 1.

§ James ii. 14, seqq.

sentiments of men can hardly be effected without producing also extravagances of speculation, moral irregularities, and skepticism. The belief of the larger part of men has rested, and must ever rest, on authority. They are but sharers in the common belief of the community or sect to which they belong; though this belief, and especially its practical effects, may be greatly modified in different individuals by personal qualities, good or bad. The knowledge of the wisest man is but the result of the action of his mind on the accumulated wisdom and judgments of those who have preceded him, and on what he believes, from testimony, to have been the experience of the past. There are no independent thinkers in the absolute sense of the words. Independent and judicious thinkers, in the more popular sense, are rare. In our intellectual, as well as our moral nature, we are parts of each other, and cannot without a severe struggle release ourselves from the traditionary opinions of those with whom we are connected. One generation inculcates its faith on another, and this is received and incorporated into the mind at a period too early for examination or doubt, and is thus perpetuated from age to age. When, therefore, the authority of the past gives way, the minds of many are liable to be greatly

unsettled. To some, the rejection of errors that have been long maintained seems equivalent to the denial of the best established truths ; for the grounds of their belief in the one and the other are the same ; both having been admitted by them on authority.* They either obstinately defend all they have been taught, or, through a

* However obvious is the general truth of the remarks above made, it may be thought by some that they are not applicable to the revolution of opinion produced by Christianity ; but that, on the contrary, the folly of the Pagan religions was such, that they could have had no strong hold on the *belief* of men through the influence of authority. But setting aside all other evidence, the proper fanaticism displayed by the Pagans in their contest with Christianity would alone be sufficient to disprove the error.

Some time after writing what is in the text, I was struck by accidentally meeting with the following passage of Lactantius, which I had read long before, but had forgotten. It speaks of the state of things when Christianity had been preached for two centuries and a half. After remarking on the Pagan religions, Lactantius says : — “ *Hæ sunt religiones, quas, sibi a majoribus suis traditas, pertinacissime tueri ac defendere perseverant ; nec considerant quales sunt ; sed ex hoc probatas atque veras esse confidunt, quod eas veteres tradiderunt ; tantaque est auctoritas vetustatis, ut inquirere in eam scelus dicatur. Itaque creditur ei passim, tanquam cognitæ veritati.*” (*Institut. Lib. II. § 6.*) — “ These are the religions, which, handed down to them from their ancestors, they persevere in most obstinately maintaining and defending. Nor do they consider of what character they are ; but are confident that they are good and true, because they have been transmitted from the ancients. So great is the authority of antiquity, that to inquire into it is pronounced impiety. It is trusted to everywhere with the same confidence as is felt in ascertained truth.”

tendency to skepticism, impatience of doubt, and an inability to estimate moral evidence, and consequently to discriminate what may be *proved* true, and what false, reject the whole together. Others, again, join at once in the new movement ; and, feeling themselves released from the ordinary restraints of speculation, confident, like the Corinthians, that they have knowledge, and elated by their victory over what wiser men have revered, promulgate, often in a new dialect, their crude and inconsequent doctrines, perhaps as the anticipated wisdom of a coming age.

In the breaking up of old opinions, the true and only appeal is to reason. But the process is difficult, and there are not many who are capable of carrying it through. When we personify abstract reason, we must acknowledge that her decisions are final. But in a large portion of individual minds the actual power of reasoning is small ; or rather, if we take into view the whole human race, as spread over the earth, we shall perceive that there is a very large majority in whom the power of determining by themselves any controversy concerning the higher objects of thought cannot be said to exist. In revolutions of religious opinion, therefore, it has been common to substitute for reason an imaginary faculty,—an intuitive perception of the high-

est truths. Men claim to know that their opinions are true, on the ground that they directly perceive them to be true without the intervention of reasoning. This claim to inward illumination, to an immediate revelation to individual men, has commonly, as in the case of the Gnostics, been asserted by particular sects as their peculiar privilege; but in our times the privilege has been extended, with magnificent absurdity, to the whole human race.

One other fact may be remarked. In all reforms, it is common for men to discern the truth imperfectly, under one aspect alone; to mistake general for unlimited propositions; and to affirm what is true in a certain sense, and with certain modifications, as universally true. They seize, perhaps, on some doctrine recommended to them by its being opposite to an old error, and without defining it in their own minds, or reconciling it with admitted truths, or viewing it in its extent and relations, insist on its absolute, unqualified reception.

But in the interregnum and partial anarchy that take place between the overthrow of one system and the establishment of another, moral disorders commonly break out. The passions throw off their restraints, as well as the understanding. Men's notions of duty change with

their religious belief ; and they regard as indifferent actions which they before thought obligatory or criminal ; or they even ascribe to the same actions an opposite moral character. The limits of right and wrong are for a time obscured ; and there are those who will take advantage of this uncertainty to transgress. The reception of the new system constitutes a distinction, which, in the minds of some, supersedes the necessity and merit of common virtues. There is a wild growth of error, and all religious errors, being mistakes concerning the nature, relations, and duties of man, tend to moral evil. Thus all great and apparently sudden revolutions of religious opinion, which are commonly, in some sense, reforms, as being a reaction against abuses and errors, are accompanied in their turn by new errors and excesses.

It was, I conceive, in contemplation of the demoralizing effects commonly attending sudden changes of religious opinion, however beneficial in their final or immediate result, that our Saviour, at the commencement of his ministry, thus addressed his hearers :— “ Think not that I have come to annul the Law or the Prophets ; I have not come to annul, but to perfect. For I tell you in truth, not till heaven and earth pass away, shall the smallest letter or stroke

pass away from the Law ; no, not till all things are ended." * His meaning was, — Think not that I have come to set aside those religious and moral principles, the true Law of God, which your faith inculcates. I have come to explain them more fully, and to enforce them more solemnly. They remain for ever unchangeable. And thus he goes on to say, — "Whoever shall break one of these least commandments [that is, one of the least of those which he was about to give] shall be least in the kingdom of Heaven. For unless your goodness exceed that of the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees, ye shall not enter the kingdom of Heaven." †

It was among the Gentile converts that the Gnostics appeared ; and we shall perceive, that, even under the teaching of St. Paul, and those associated with him, the apprehensions of many of the Gentile converts concerning our religion must have been imperfect and erroneous, when we consider what opportunities they enjoyed for attaining a knowledge of it, for correcting their former prejudices, and for determining its bearing upon the mass of their old conceptions

* Matthew v. 17, 18.

† Ibid. verses 19, 20.

and opinions. They had not the help of the New Testament. With the exception of his own epistles, the oral teaching of St. Paul and his associates was probably the main source of instruction to a majority of his converts. But the Apostle, earnest to spread as widely as possible a knowledge of Christ, and driven hither and thither by persecution, often rested but a short time in the places which he visited. Many, we may believe, after witnessing his miraculous power, and hearing from him the fundamental facts and doctrines of Christianity, professed themselves converts, though they had had only a brief opportunity of listening to his expositions of truth and duty. Some doubtless embraced the religion under a temporary excitement of feeling, without a just notion of its character, or a correct sense of the obligations it imposed. We cannot question, that, by the Apostle as well as by our Saviour, the seed was often scattered where it sprung up to be choked by weeds. He would encourage every motion toward good. He would not repel any one who professed a desire to turn from sin to righteousness, however crude and unformed were his conceptions of the new religion. He would receive as a disciple whoever regarded it with favor. He would act in the spirit of the words of his

Master, — “Forbid him not ; for he that is not against you is for you.”

Such being the state of things, great errors, schisms, opposing parties, and moral irregularities existed, in consequence, among the earliest Gentile converts. They are often referred to in the Epistles of St. Paul. Into what gross misconceptions of Christianity individuals who professed themselves converts to it might fall, may appear from the fact, that some among the Corinthians denied its fundamental doctrine of a future life. “How say some among you,” asks the Apostle, “that there is no resurrection of the dead ?” * The tendency to these evils was aggravated by a spirit of opposition to St. Paul. This originated among the bigoted Jews, zealous for the observance of the Levitical Law by the Gentile converts ; and, there can be little doubt, spread from them to others. In his second Epistle to the Corinthians, there is much referring to opponents who spoke of him disrespectfully and reproachfully. Thus, under the operation of the various circumstances that we have adverted to, individuals were led to form systems for themselves, different from the religion taught by the Apostles ; and a way was

* 1 Cor. xv. 12.

opened for speculations as extravagant as those of the Gnostics, for moral principles as loose as were those of some of their number, and for the existence of sects which, deriving their origin from the preaching of Christianity, had yet no title to the Christian name.

BUT we must also recollect, that a knowledge of Christianity was spread by others than the Apostles, and their immediate associates, and those whose teaching they sanctioned. Of such as were or thought themselves converts, many would be zealous to communicate the new doctrine to others. From them it would often pass, more or less mutilated by their ignorance, or adulterated by their prejudices, or blended with their former errors. Of such teachers from among the Jewish converts, who insisted on the observance of the Levitical Law, we have abundant evidence in St. Paul's Epistles. Beside them, we cannot doubt that there were, from the body of Gentile Christians, others with very different conceptions. It is easy to conceive what crude and false notions of our religion may thus have been spread among its remoter and less informed professors, and how far it may have been divested of that solemn authority with

which it impressed the mind of an intelligent believer.

GREAT errors might be consistent with honest zeal in those who thus communicated their imperfect conceptions of Christianity. But there also appeared among Christians pretended teachers of our religion, to whom honest zeal cannot be ascribed. They are spoken of by St. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, as "false apostles, fraudulent workmen, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ," but in truth "ministers of Satan." * They are described by him as "the many who adulterate, for the sake of gain, the doctrine of God."† The heathen sophists taught for money; and, undoubtedly, often sought to distinguish themselves, for the sake of procuring hearers, by novel, paradoxical, and licentious opinions. When Christianity opened a wholly new field for speculation, producing a strong excitement and action of mind wherever preached, men of a similar character would be ready to take advantage of this state of things. Thus we find that among the Corinthians there soon appeared false teachers, whose object was to procure a

* 2 Cor. xi. 13, 15.

† Ibid. ii. 17.

maintenance, and who defrauded and oppressed their disciples. It is in reference to them, or to some one of their number, that St. Paul says, — “Ye bear it patiently, if a man make slaves of you, if he devour you, if he take your property, if he treat you insolently, if he strike you on the face. I speak it with shame; for it is as if we ourselves suffered.”* Some, probably most or all, of these men, it appears, were Jews; for, speaking of his opponents, he says, — “Are they Hebrews? So am I”;† and these Jews might have learned from their own Rabbis to receive fees from their disciples. With the conduct of such false teachers St. Paul contrasts his own in taking nothing from the Corinthians; partly because he would “afford no pretence to those who wished for a pretence.”‡ And what is remarkable, the very circumstance of his preaching gratuitously was made use of by his opponents to depreciate his character; and he found himself called upon to defend his conduct in this respect. “Have I,” he says indignantly, “humbling myself that you might be exalted, done wrong in preaching to you the gospel of God gratuitously?”§ The Corin-

* 2 Cor. xi. 20, 21.

† Ibid. xi. 12.

‡ Ibid. xi. 22.

§ Ibid. xi. 7.

thians were so familiar with the custom of paying the highest fees to those professed teachers of wisdom who were in the most repute, that some of them were disposed to regard as of little value a teacher who did not demand money for his instructions.

He alludes to the subject again, late in life, in his Epistle to Titus. "There are many," he says, "especially among those of the circumcision, who are disorderly, vain talkers, deluding men's minds, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole families, teaching what should not be taught for the sake of shameful gain." * And he also refers to them in his first Epistle to Timothy, written about the same time with that to Titus. "If any one," he says, "teach another doctrine, and hold not to the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine of piety, he is puffed up, understanding nothing, but having a diseased craving for discussions and strifes of words, from which proceed ill-will, quarrelling, reviling, malicious surmises, perverse disputations of men of corrupt minds, destitute of the truth, thinking to make a gain of piety. From such keep away. Piety, indeed, with contentment, is a great gain.

* Ch. i. 10, 11.

We have brought nothing into the world ; it is clear that we can carry nothing out of it ; having, then, food and clothing, with these we shall be satisfied. But they, whose purpose it is to be rich,* fall into temptation, and a snare, and many senseless and pernicious lusts, which plunge men into destruction and ruin. The root of all these evils † is the love of money, through their craving after which some have strayed from the truth, and have pierced themselves through with many pangs.” ‡

This class of false teachers existed among the Gnostics ; and, probably, most of their professors of wisdom, like the heathen sophists, gave instruction only to those disciples who were able to purchase it. Speaking of some of their doctrines, Irenæus says ironically : — “ It seems to me reasonable that they should not be willing to teach them openly to all, but only to those who are able to pay a great price for such mysteries ; for these doctrines are not like those concerning which our Lord said, ‘ Freely ye have received, freely give ’ ; but are remote

* Referring, I conceive, to those before spoken of as “ men of corrupt minds.”

† Not “ the root of all evil,” as in the common version. The original is, *Ῥίζα γὰρ πάντων τῶν κακῶν*.

‡ Ch. vi. 3 – 10.

from common apprehension, marvellous and profound mysteries, to be attained with much toil by the lovers of falsehood. Who, indeed, would not spend his whole substance to learn them?"* Such teachers existing, it can be no matter of surprise, that some of them taught systems as unlike Christianity as those of any of the Gnostic sects, and that others merely borrowed certain conceptions from our religion without pretending to embrace it.

Had it, indeed, been other than a revelation from God, expressing its divine origin in its whole history and character, had it been only a new form of barbaric philosophy, that had sprung up among the Jews in Galilee, then, instead of bearing down through the heathen world, a broad and ever-widening stream, it would have been choked by corruptions and errors, through which it could not force its way; it would have been wasted and lost, like those rivers of Africa and the East that disappear in deserts of sand. One incommunicable attribute alone, its divine authority, gave it permanence. Whatever might be the mistakes of its disciples concerning it, yet in its own nature it allowed of no amalgamation with human opinions, as sharing its paramount

* Lib. I. c. 4. § 3. p. 20. Conf. Lib. IV. c. 26. § 2. p. 262.

claims. It admitted of no change or addition. This opposed an insuperable barrier to all innovations, which did not at least claim, however falsely, to be original doctrines of Christianity. It controlled the operation of those causes of error which have been pointed out. It is the redeeming principle, which we may hope will yet restore the religion of Christians to the native purity of Christianity. Had it not possessed this character, had it been merely a new system of Jewish philosophy, having a fabulous origin, a system of assertions without proof, — for such Christianity is, if it be not a divine revelation, — a multitude of sects would have appeared among its Gentile followers, not hovering, like the Gnostics, on the outskirts of our faith, but seizing on the whole ground, forming theories of equal authority with the original doctrine, the records of which they could but imperfectly understand; and at the present day, instead of seeing Christianity the professed religion of the civilized world, we should know as little of disciples of Jesus, existing as a distinct body, as we know of disciples of Socrates.

It has appeared, that, with the first propagation of our religion among the Gentiles, causes of error were operating to produce resistance to

the authority of St. Paul and the other Apostles, schisms, moral irregularities, false doctrines, and apostasy. It was with a foresight of this state of things, that Jesus said, "He who perseveres to the end will be saved"; and, at the same time, predicted that many would fall away; and "they will deliver up one another, and hate one another; and many false teachers will arise, and deceive many; and iniquity will so abound, that the love of many will grow cold."* Notwithstanding the vast power which our religion displayed in changing the characters of men, such disorders and evils were to attend its progress. "But know this," says St. Paul to Timothy, in his last Epistle, when anticipating his own martyrdom, "that hereafter there will be evil times; for those men [a class of men of whom he had before spoken] will be selfish, avaricious, boastful, haughty, given to evil speaking, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, without natural affection, without faith, slanderers, of unrestrained passions, without humanity, without love for what is good, treacherous, violent, puffed up with pride, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a show of piety, but renouncing its power. From such turn away. Of their

* Matthew xxiv. 10-12.

number are those who creep into houses, and make captive weak women, laden with sins, carried away by divers evil desires, always learning and never able to gain a knowledge of the truth. But as Jannes and Jambres contended against Moses, so they contend against the truth; men whose minds are corrupt, and whose faith is unsound. But they will not proceed far; for their folly will be manifest to all, as was that of Jannes and Jambres.”*

Who “those men” were, of whom St. Paul thus speaks, appears from what precedes in the Epistle. “Put men in mind of these things,” he says (that is, of certain fundamental truths of Christianity, which he had just expressed), “ad-juring them before the Lord not to engage in idle disputes, which profit nothing, but subvert the hearers. Avoid those profane babblings; for these men will go on to greater impiety; and their doctrine will eat into them like a gangrene. Of their number are Hymenæus and Philetus, who have erred from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and who are subverting the faith of some. In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, and

2 Timothy iii. 1 - 9.

some for honorable and others for mean uses. If, then, one keep himself clear from those things, he shall be a vessel for honor. Avoid those foolish and unlearned discussions, knowing that they produce strife."*— The great body of catholic Christians was continually throwing off these disorders, and separating itself from them. But there can be no reason to doubt the existence of such disorders among the heretical as well as pseudo-Christian sects of the second and subsequent centuries.

THERE is no historical evidence which justifies us in believing that what assumes to be a second Epistle of Peter, and that which has been ascribed to the Apostle Jude, were the works of those authors; and the character and contents of the writings are unfavorable to the supposition. The ancient Christians are not responsible for any error concerning their authorship; for it does not appear that they were generally considered as genuine during the first three centuries. It seems to me most probable that they were composed in the first half of the second century, under the names of those Apostles; and that the writer of each assumed a

* 2 Timothy ii. 14-23.

character not his own, rather by way of rhetorical artifice, than with intentional fraud. In both, individuals of depraved morals are described as existing among Christians, in language which, if not that of the Apostles, we may consider as declamatory and exaggerated, but cannot look upon as without foundation. It appears that those spoken of were not yet wholly separated from the communion of catholic Christians. "They are hidden rocks in your love-feasts,"* it is said. But they are spoken of as those "who are making a separation";† and the feelings expressed toward them in these Epistles are such as must have produced their severance from the catholic body. They were not only immoral in their lives, but "false teachers, secretly bringing in destructive heresies";‡ and the language used may suggest the inference, that these were Gnostic heresies. Thus it is said, that they "denied the Sovereign Lord who bought them, and our Lord Jesus Christ";§ meaning, we may suppose, that they denied that the Creator

* Jude, verse 12. Comp. 2 Peter ii. 13, where *dytairas* seems probably the true reading.

† Jude, verse 19. *Oi ἀνομιολίτοις* · the word *ἐαυτούς*, which follows in the Received Text, does not appear to be genuine.

‡ 2 Peter ii. 1.

§ 2 Peter ii. 1 ; Jude 4.

was the Supreme God, and held opinions concerning Christ so contradictory to the truth, as to amount to a denial of his real character. To the pretension of the Gnostics, that they alone were spiritual, and possessed of true knowledge, the writers may be supposed to refer indignantly and contemptuously, when they describe those of whom they speak, as "animal, not having the spirit,"* as "speaking evil of what they understand not," and as "brute beasts, governed by instinct, made to be taken and destroyed."† "They promised men freedom," it is said, "while they themselves were slaves of corruption";‡ language corresponding to the representations of the early fathers concerning the pretensions and character of many among the Gnostics. It may be added, that they taught for money : — "Through covetousness," it is said, "they will make a gain of you by fraudulent discourses";§ and they are compared to Balaam, who "loved the wages of unrighteousness," || having been tempted by the bribes of Balak. "Woe for them," says the author of the Epistle ascribed to Jude, "for they have walked in the way of Cain, and given

* Jude 19.

† 2 Peter ii. 12 ; Jude 10.

‡ 2 Peter ii. 19.

§ Ibid. verse 3.

|| Ibid. verse 15.

themselves up to deceive, like Balaam, for pay, and brought destruction on themselves through rebellion, like Korah."* — It is not, perhaps, improbable, that these Epistles were written about the time that Gnosticism was first making its appearance, and before it had yet acquired any reputable or able leaders.

THE date of the Apocalypse is uncertain ; but it is, I think, to be referred either to the latter part of the first, or the earlier part of the second century. In the addresses to the seven churches of Asia, we find mention of the same vices, as existing among professed Christians, which we have before remarked ; and in speaking of them, Balaam is introduced under a point of view different from that in which he appears in the Epistles ascribed to Peter and Jude. Thus, in the address to the church at Pergamus, it is said, — “ But I have a few things against thee, for thou hast those who follow the teaching of Balaam, who instructed Balak how to cause the Israelites to offend, by eating idol-sacrifices and committing fornication ; so hast thou, too, those who thus follow the teaching of the Nicolaïtans ” ; † — that is, thou, too, hast

* Jude 11.

† Revelation ii. 14, 15.

those who eat idol-sacrifices and commit fornication. The Nicolaitans are also mentioned once before ; * and this appellation appears to be used as equivalent to "followers of Balaam," the significance of "Balaam" in Hebrew, and "Nicolaüs" in Greek, being the same. The name Nicolaitans was subsequently applied to Gnostics who led licentious lives, till at last it came to be considered as the name of a sect.† This sect was then supposed to derive its origin from Nicolaüs ‡ (Nicholas), one of the seven deacons appointed by the Apostles.§ The fable, for such it is to be considered, is rejected by Clement of Alexandria, who gives an account of Nicolaüs, perhaps equally unfounded, in which he is represented as an ascetic.|| The Nicolaitans are the sect before referred to, ¶ as, according to Clement, perverting the maxim, that "the body must be abused," which he ascribes to Nicolaüs.

It appears, then, that, from the times of the Apostles, immoral doctrines and practices had

* Revelation ii. 6.

† Irenæus, Lib. I. c. 26. § 3. p. 105. Conf. Lib. III. c. 11. § 1. p. 188.

‡ Ibid. § Acts vi. 5.

§ Stromat. II. § 20. pp. 490, 491. Stromat. III. § 4. pp. 522, 523.

¶ See p. 131.

existed among professed Christians, and that, due allowance being made for the language of controversial enmity, and for charges brought against Christian Gnostics, which, so far as they were true, were true only of sects not Christian, there is still no reason to doubt that the principles of a portion of the Gnostics did not secure them from the common vices of the Pagan world; and that there were those among them, who perverted their doctrines to defend themselves in criminal irregularities. The character of the great body of Christians, founded on the requirements of our religion, the supervision exercised by their respective churches over the morals of individual members, their rejection from their number of those whose lives or whose principles were essentially unchristian, — these causes, in connection with the persecution which they suffered from without, were continually operating to produce a separation between them and such individuals as have been described. But there was nothing to prevent such individuals from forming, or from joining, a looser class of heretics, and announcing themselves as Gnostics, or, in other words, as peculiarly enlightened.

Many of the first converts to Christianity must, as we have seen, have had but very im-

perfect information concerning it. Former prejudices still retained a strong hold on their minds. In the effervescence of the times, false teachers soon arose. The doctrine of the Apostles was resisted on the one hand, and perverted on the other. Such being the state of things in the first century, the way was prepared for the existence, in the second century, of doctrines as remote from Christianity as those of the Gnostics. They were the fruit of errors that had sprung up when the Gospel was planted, and had accompanied its growth.

During the second century, all those distinctly recognized as heretics among the Gentile converts were, or were represented to be, Gnostics. As has been before observed, it was natural that an ill-informed convert, possessed with the common prejudices of the Gentiles, should adopt the Gnostic doctrine concerning the Old Testament and the God of the Jews. It was equally natural that one who had become separated from the great body of Christians by an immoral life, if he did not renounce his religion altogether, should join a body of heretics whose extraordinary pretensions at once afforded a cover for his vices and a gratification to his vanity. He would pass over to the looser class of theosophic Gnostics.

Thus it may be conceived, that, in the second century, those irregularities and vices settled down among them, which, in the first century, appear diffused through the body of Christians.

WE have had occasion to bring into view the disorders among Christians, that unquestionably existed during the apostolic age. But we must be careful not to have an exaggerated idea of their nature or extent. They were such as could not but attend so wonderful a change of thought and feeling as our religion produced, and the formation of a body of Christians in the midst of such a world as lay around them. In the latter half of the second century, the catholic Christians were, as I have said, preëminently distinguished by their religious character and high morality; and are liable as a community to no graver charge, than that their virtues bordered on asceticism, austerity, and enthusiasm. The commotion in men's minds produced by the first preaching of our religion had subsided. It was better understood. The books of the New Testament, and especially the Gospels, were now open to the examination of all, and afforded means for studying its history and character. The great body of Chris-

tians, who were united in a common faith, had been purified by severe sufferings and persecution, and by the discipline which they maintained among themselves. They were a new class of men, standing in contrast with their heathen contemporaries; and the grosser vices of the world found either no entrance or no toleration among them. But it is not strange if the overwhelming licentiousness of the times forced itself in, where the weaker faith and the erroneous doctrines of the Gnostics presented a feebler resistance, or opened a way for its admission.

BUT this subject requires some further explanation. We may readily understand why, at the present day, individuals without Christian faith, or without Christian morals, should claim to be called Christians, or why the generality of men in a Christian country, whatever may be the strength of their faith, or its practical influence, should acquiesce in being numbered as believers; but the inquiry may well arise, how it was, that, when to be a Christian was to expose one's self to hatred and persecution, any should take that name, except from such sincere conviction and such conscientious motives as would preserve them from indulging in the vices

of the heathen world, and especially from justifying such indulgence on principle.

The solution of the fact is, that the looser heretics did not expose themselves to persecution. The hatred of the Heathens to the Christians manifested itself by irregular outbreaks. It would be a great mistake to suppose that the proceedings against them, at least before the latter part of the third century, resembled the systematized persecution of infidels and heretics in those Roman Catholic countries where the Inquisition has been established. The steady action of law was unknown throughout the Roman Empire. Its machinery was wholly out of order. Its workings were irregular and interrupted. The government was a government of force. After the time of Nero till that of Diocletian, the Emperors, for the most part, appear rather to have yielded to the spirit of persecution, than to have excited it. The sufferings of the Christians were occasioned far less by their edicts, than by the superstition and enmity of the lower classes, the cruelty of some of the provincial governors, and the license and rapacity of the soldiery. Such persecutors would, in general, select their victims from the most conscientious and zealous among the number of those who, from their circumstances in

life, might be most easily oppressed, or who, being conspicuous among Christians, had, at the same time, incurred some particular odium. The more licentious among the heretics had little to fear. They, probably, called themselves Gnostics, or enlightened men, rather than Christians; for the latter name might not only have exposed them to obloquy and danger, but would have confounded them with the great body of believers, whom they looked down upon with contempt. They were connected with the heathen world in its vices and in its idol-worship. Nor, by a man devoid of conscientiousness and self-devotion, was danger to be apprehended, even if, by some accident, he might be accused as a Christian. The judicial trials of Christians were very unlike those of heretics in later times. The accused had his condemnation or acquittal in his own power. He might save himself by renouncing his faith, or by denying it. All that was required of him was to profess himself not a Christian, and to burn incense before the judge in honor of an idol, or to swear by the Genius of the Emperor.

It appears, indeed, that many of the theosophic Gnostics withdrew themselves from that severe discipline of persecution to which the catholic Christians were exposed, and which

tended essentially to preserve their moral energy, their spiritual character, and their high tone of virtue. Tertullian has a discourse, written with all his usual vehemence, against such as dissuaded from martyrdom. It is entitled *Scorpiace*, that is, "An Antidote against Scorpions"; for to scorpions he compares those whom he considered as endeavouring to instil poison into others, which would cause their spiritual death. "When the faith," he says, "is vexed with fire, and the church is in the midst of flames, like the burning bush, then the Gnostics break out, then the Valentinians creep forth, then all the opposers of martyrdom are made active by the heat to strike, to dart their stings, and to kill."* They taught, that to profess the faith at the cost of life was not required by God, who desires the death of no man, but was an act of folly. The true profession they maintained to be the holding of the true doctrine in the sight of God, not a profession made openly before men. Similar principles and a corresponding practice are charged upon the heretics generally by Irenæus; though he admits that there had been martyrs from their number. The Gnostics, according to him, maintained that it

* *Scorpiace*, c. 1. p. 487.

was not necessary to submit to martyrdom. Their doctrine was the true attestation of their faith.* "Some," he says, "have had the hardihood to despise martyrs, and to cast censure on those who are put to death for the profession of the Lord."† The same account is given of one portion of the heretics by Clement of Alexandria. Through an irreligious and cowardly love of life, he says, they represented martyrdom as self-murder; maintaining that the true Christian testimony was not a martyr's testimony, but their own higher knowledge of Him who is really God. Clement, however, says, that other heretics (referring, doubtless, to the Marcionites) were, through enmity to the Creator, eager to expose themselves to martyrdom.‡ A writer quoted by Eusebius observes, that some heretical sects had furnished many martyrs, and particularly mentions the Marcionites as claiming this distinction.§

Among the theosophic Gnostics, the ascetics, we may presume, were equally ready with the Marcionites to suffer when their faith required it. Of the practice and the doctrine of others

* *Cont. Hæres. Lib. IV. c. 33. § 9. p. 272.*

† *Ibid. Lib. III. c. 18. § 5. p. 210.*

‡ *Stromat. IV. § 4. p. 571.*

§ *Hist. Eccles. Lib. V. c. 16.*

of that class of Gnostics, but especially of the principles of their leaders, we may judge in some degree from a passage of the Valentinian, Heracleon, preserved by Clement of Alexandria,* a part of which has been already quoted.† It, at once, serves to explain, and to give credibility to, what is said concerning them by their catholic opponents. In commenting on the words of Jesus, in which he speaks of that profession of him which his disciples were required to make before men, and especially before those in authority, Heracleon says, that there is a profession which is made by faith and conduct, and another by words; that the latter, which is made before those in authority, is erroneously considered by most as the only profession; but that it may be made by hypocrites, and that it has not been made by all those who have been saved, and, among them, not by several of the Apostles. It is only partial, not complete; complete profession is made by works and deeds, corresponding to faith in Christ. He who makes this profession will make the other, should it become a duty, and reason require it. He will rightly profess Christ in words who has previously professed him in his dispositions. Heracleon adds

* Stromat. IV. § 9. pp. 595, 596.

† See before, p. 129.

more to the same effect, but nothing which alters the complexion of the passage. In his comments upon it, Clement says, that here and elsewhere Heracleon, whom he calls the most approved of the Valentinians, appears to agree in opinion with catholic Christians. He conceives, however, that he has disregarded the fact, that a martyr's profession is alone sufficient proof of sincere faith; and observes on the unreasonableness of supposing that it might be made by a hypocrite. "To profess our faith," he goes on to say, "is the duty of all, for this is in our power; to defend it is not the duty of all, for it may not be in our power"; * words that may remind one of Latimer, when, broken by age and suffering, he declared to his judges, that he could not argue for his religion, but that he could die for it.

However unobjectionable, in themselves considered, were the leading sentiments of Heracleon, they were, when thus nakedly stated, not altogether apposite to the times. It is not too much to say, that he discovers some tendency to depreciate that bold profession of Christ, by which, when made before a persecuting judge,

* Τὸ ὁμολογεῖν ἐκ παντὸς δεῖ· ἐφ' ἡμῖν γάρ· ἀπολογεῖσθαι δὲ οὐκ ἐκ παντός· οὐ γὰρ καὶ τοῦτο ἐφ' ἡμῖν. p. 506.

a Christian sealed his condemnation to torture and death. It is easy to perceive how his view of the subject might degenerate into that which Tertullian, in his "Scorpiace," says was presented by the Valentinians.

There is, indeed, a very striking contrast between the passage of Heracleon, and two treatises which remain to us, one by Tertullian, and the other by Origen. That of Tertullian is entitled "Concerning Flight in Persecution." It is a strong exhortation not to avoid persecution, either by flight, or by buying off those who threatened to become informers. It is written with the intense earnestness of one who, if he had not been a Christian, might have raised a warrior's voice, of power

"To cheer in the mid battle, ay, to turn the flying."

There can be little doubt, that often, under the circumstances of those times, the course of conduct to which he exhorted was that most honorable to Christians, most likely to command the respect of their enemies, and best adapted to extend the knowledge and influence of our religion. In more than one instance, persecution appears to have been checked by the number and intrepidity of those who were ready to submit to martyrdom. There may be errors of

reasoning in his work, but the deepest sincerity is evident throughout ; and, compared with his other writings, it has a subdued tone of expression suited to the subject. It is characterized, at the same time, by an unshrinking consistency, in which its severe purpose is never for a moment lost sight of, and by a sustained energy of wholly unworldly feeling. Tertullian concludes it with the following words : —

“ This doctrine, brother, perhaps seems to you hard and intolerable. But recollect what God said, — *Let him who can receive it receive it ; that is, Let him who cannot receive it depart.* He who fears to suffer does not belong to him who suffered. But he who does not fear to suffer is perfect in love, the love of God ; *for perfect love casts out fear.* Thus it is, that *many are called, but few are chosen.* He is not sought for, who is ready to follow the broad way, but he who will take the narrow path. And thus the Paraclete is necessary, the leader into all truth, the encourager to endure all things ; whom they who have received neither fly persecution, nor buy it off ; we having him on our side, both to speak for us when interrogated, and to aid us when suffering.”

Tertullian, when he wrote this tract, had become a Montanist ; and the Holy Spirit, which

the Montanists believed to have spoken by Montanus, they commonly denominated the Paraclete.

There is as great a difference between the treatise of Origen and that of Tertullian, as may well exist between two works of able writers, relating to the same subject, and having nearly the same purpose. That of Origen is of particular interest. It was addressed, during a time of persecution, to two friends, with one of whom he appears to have been particularly connected, to exhort them to meet suffering and death with Christian fortitude. When we can bring before our minds all that is implied in one friend's writing to another to encourage him to martyrdom, we may, in one respect, have a distinct conception of the state and character of the early catholic Christians. The address of Origen is affectionate, considerate, and respectful, but with no expression of temporary excitement. On the contrary, it has something of his usual languor and diffuseness of style, and oversubtilty of thought. It is characterized by the calmness of one who was thoroughly penetrated by the spirit of our religion, whose earthly passions had been subdued, whose hopes were fixed on heaven; and who had thus learned to look on life and death indifferently, and to contemplate suffering as one prepared for it.

"I would," says Origen, "that you may be able through the whole of this present conflict to bear in mind the great reward which is laid up in heaven for those who are persecuted and reviled for righteousness' sake, and for the sake of the Son of Man ; so as to rejoice, and exult, and leap for joy, as the Apostles in former days rejoiced, when they were deemed worthy to suffer contumely for him. Would, indeed, that your souls may not be at all perturbed, but that, when standing before the tribunal, and when the naked sword hangs over your throats, you may be strengthened by the peace of God which passes all understanding, and made calm by the thought, that they who are absent from the body are present with the Lord of All. But if we are not able always to preserve our firmness, I would at least that our trouble may not appear, and show itself to those who are alien from our faith." *

"Whether our profession of Christ be complete or not, we may thus determine. If, through the whole time of the inquisition and temptation, we yield no place in our hearts to the Devil, who would corrupt us with evil thoughts of denying our faith, or cause us to

* *Exhortatio ad Martyrium*, § 4. Origen. Opp. I. 276.

hesitate, or pervert us by some sophistry to what is at enmity with a martyr's testimony and our perfection ; if, with this, we bring no stain upon ourselves by any word foreign from our profession ; if we endure all the reproach, and mockery, and laughter, and reviling of our adversaries, and the pity which they seem to have for us, regarding us as in error and foolish, and speaking to us as deluded ; and, still more, if the strong love of children, or their mother, or any of those dearest to us in this world, do not violently draw us back to their enjoyment or to this life ; but, turning from them all, we can devote ourselves wholly to God, and to that life which is with him, as about to be associated with his Only Son and with his followers ; — then we may say, that we have fully perfected our profession.” *

The tone of mind expressed by Tertullian and Origen is very different from that of Heracleon. It is to men possessed with their spirit, that we are indebted, through the providence of God, for the preservation of Christianity. Wholly relieved, as we are, from the necessity of practising those high and hard duties which were appointed to them, we may be unable,

* Ibid. § 11. p. 281.

without an effort, to enter into their principles and feelings. Looking, under very different circumstances, to the severe sufferings to which they were summoned, and not having been strengthened to meet them by that preparatory discipline which they had gone through, we may even shrink from sympathy, and feel rather with those who fled, or bought off their accusers, in times of persecution. But let us at least be just, and give honor where honor is due ; and not suffer our attention to be engrossed by the extravagance that sometimes marked the strength of those virtues which the early Christians displayed, and almost necessarily accompanied them in such minds as Tertullian's.*

I HAVE spoken of the Gnostics as they existed in the second century, and of the charges brought against them by the *early* fathers, the fathers of the second and third centuries. After

* Gibbon (ch. xvi. note 100) says, that the treatise of Tertullian is "filled with the wildest fanaticism, and the most incoherent declamation." That a work such as I have described should appear to a writer like Gibbon expressive of the wildest fanaticism may easily be supposed. But the assertion that it is full of incoherent declamation is utterly unfounded. No writer ever kept his purpose more steadily in view, than does Tertullian in this treatise.

Very probably, Gibbon had never read it, but he had perhaps
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this time, there is, as I have before remarked, little reason to believe that any proper Gnostic sects survived in much vigor. Their doctrines were such as strike with the glare of novelty, and are thrown aside when that becomes tarnished. They were superseded by the kindred sect of the Manichæans. Through the union of Christianity with the imperial power, a flood of corruption poured in among Christians; and a variety of new, bitter, worldly controversies arose, in the fourth century, which diverted men's attention from the old errors of the Gnostics, except as a matter of history, and a means of blackening the name of heretic by odious representations of those who had borne it. There is no reason to doubt that the Gnostics who still remained shared in the degeneracy of that evil age, when darkness was beginning to close over men, and they were about to enter on that long series of centuries that marks the his-

seen what is said by Jortin: — "In the persecution under Severus, many fled to avoid it, or gave money to redeem themselves. Tertullian, like a frantic Montanist, condemned these expedients." (Remarks on Ecclesiastical History. (Lond. 1805.) Vol. II. p. 90.) — Jortin was a scholar of some elegance and some acuteness, but of little compass of mind, and wanting almost every requisite essential in treating of the history of the early Christians. In aiming at smartness of style he sometimes falls into flippancy.

tory of the world with its mental and moral desolation. But the specific charges urged against the Gnostics by the orthodox historians of heresy in the fourth and fifth centuries, with Epiphanius at their head, are so obviously in great part calumnies, as to afford no safe ground for determining what was, or what had been, the character of those against whom they are brought. I have, in a note at the end of this volume, stated some facts which show with what incredulity we may be justified in regarding them.*

It appears, then, from what precedes, that there was great diversity of moral character among the Gnostics. Some were distinguished for their severe asceticism, and others for their principled licentiousness. The inveterate prejudices of the Gentiles against the Jews and Judaism, the traditionary errors of the Jews concerning their religion, the form, consequently, in which it was presented to the minds of the new converts, and their inability to comprehend the subject correctly, and to solve, in a satisfactory manner, the difficulties with which it was and is embarrassed, caused a portion of the

* See Additional Note, C.

Gentile converts to separate the Mosaic dispensation from the Christian, and to regard the latter alone as coming from the Supreme Being. These were the Gnostics. But the arbitrary hypothesis of a Supreme God and an inferior god, by which the Gnostics made a forced separation of Judaism from Christianity, and the inconsistency of their scheme with the plain language of Christ and his Apostles, spread confusion and indistinctness through all their conceptions of our religion. Notwithstanding this, the Marcionites, influenced more by moral and Christian feeling than by any other cause, in rejecting the representations of the Old Testament as applicable to the true God, did not fall behind the catholic Christians in the strictness or strength of their self-denying virtues. On the contrary, there seems to have been much of fanaticism mixed with their renunciation of the pleasures of this life. But the theosophic Gnostics were less detached from the heathen world. They drew their vague speculations from its philosophy. There was a tendency in their minds to substitute for the realities of God's revelation a baseless, abstract faith, the evidence of which was the testimony of their own spiritual nature. They seem to have regarded Christianity too much as a system

of philosophy, and too little as a divine revelation. They thus stood as a sort of intermediate class between the catholic Christians and the Heathens. Many of them, doubtless, received our religion in good faith, according to their modification of it, and conformed their lives to the moral purity which it requires ; but it does not appear that any considerable number felt it to be a means of the moral renovation of mankind, or regarded themselves as called upon to seal their testimony to it with their blood. It is clear that they had not that zeal in avowing and defending and propagating their faith, as of inestimable value to their fellow-men, which exposed the catholic Christians to persecution. Some of them, pretending, perhaps, as men of enlightened minds, to hold in disregard outward forms of religion, joined, of their own accord, in idol-sacrifices ; while others, like the ancient heathen philosophers, were probably ready to escape odium and vexation by whatever compliances were necessary with the popular superstitions. It appears, further, that there were some, perhaps many, of their number, who, though not countenanced by their principal leaders, or the more respectable portion of the theosophic Gnostics, seized on the doctrine of the incorruptible purity of their spiritual nature, as

a pretence for indulging in gross vices. The existence of such a class of men, not altogether destitute of belief in the divine mission of our Saviour, is, as we have seen, accounted for by causes that had been in operation from the time when St. Paul first gathered converts from the Gentiles. They were early thrown off from the body of catholic Christians, and became apostates or heretics. It may readily be believed that they had no attachment to Judaism which would prevent them from becoming Gnostics, and, in the pride of their new spiritual superiority, looking down upon the unenlightened and over-scrupulous body of Christians by whom they were rejected. In taking this course they met with no obstacle ; for among the generality of theosophic Gnostics there was no combination or discipline, which might have repelled or excluded the unworthy from being associated with them.

Nor was there any thing precisely to define the limits between the theosophic Gnostics and individuals holding Gnostic opinions, and more or less affected by the widely spreading influence of Christianity, who yet had no title to the name of Christians. But, though the limits were undefined, there was the well-marked general distinction between those who decided-

ly belonged to one class or the other, that the former believed, and the latter did not believe, the divine mission of Christ. In respect, also, to one noted pseudo-Christian sect which has been mistaken for a branch of the Gnostics, I mean the Carpocratians, it will appear, I think, from what is about to be said, that its members did not even hold Gnostic doctrines. We must, therefore, separate, as far as possible, the pseudo-Christians from the Gnostics ; and to this subject we will next attend.

CHAPTER V.

ON SOME PSEUDO-CHRISTIAN SECTS AND INDIVIDUALS WHO
HAVE BEEN IMPROPERLY CONFOUNDED WITH THE GNOS-
TICS.

WE have seen that Simon Magus is represented by the fathers as the parent of all the heretical sects, while, at the same time, he is described, not as a disciple of Christ, but as opposing himself to Christ as a rival. His followers, the Simonians, therefore, were not Christians. These facts may induce us readily to give credit to the supposition, that among those who may seem to be, or who are, enumerated as Christian heretics, by some one or more of the fathers, there were other sects or individuals who had no title to the name of Christian; though many of them may have held the Gnostic doctrine, that the material universe is the work of a being or beings imperfect or evil. This confusion, if it exist, of Christian and pseudo-Christian sects must be removed, before we can form a correct notion of the Gnostics; and the investigation of the subject may also

serve to make us acquainted with the character of the times, and the effects produced by the promulgation of Christianity.

AMONG the sects referred to, the *Carpocratians* may be first mentioned. They had their origin in Alexandria, and became conspicuous about the middle of the second century. By Irenæus they are classed with the Gnostics; and, according to him, they affirmed that the world was made by angels. But a comparison of his whole account* with the information afforded by Clement of Alexandria† may lead us to the conclusion, that the Carpocratians were neither Christians nor heathen Gnostics, but a corrupt sect of Platonists, who pretended to regard Christ as a very eminent philosopher among the Barbarians, as Confucius was at one time celebrated by European^a men of letters. This may appear from what follows.

With Carpocrates was connected, as a founder of the sect, his son Epiphanes, the author of a work "Concerning Justice," from which Clement quotes a series of passages.‡

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. I. c. 25. pp. 103 – 105. c. 28. § 2. p. 107. Lib. II. cc. 31 – 33. pp. 164 – 168.

† Stromat. III. § 2. pp. 511 – 515.

‡ Stromat. III. ubi supra.

The purpose of them is to maintain that no property should exist, but that all things should be common to all. "The justice of God," Epiphanes says, "is a certain equal distribution."* Following out his principles, he maintains, as Plato had taught in his Republic, that there should be a community of women;—women in Egypt and Greece, as in the East, being regarded much in the light of property. For his doctrine of equality he argues from the natural order of things; according to which, for example, God gives the light of the sun equally to all; and a common nature, and food in common, to all the individuals of the different species of animals. This order he vindicates as good, he regards it as a manifestation of the great moral law of all beings, and ascribes it to the "Maker and Father of All," that is, to the Supreme God. •

It appears, therefore, that Epiphanes regarded the order of nature as good, and as proceeding from the Supreme Being. He differed, therefore, from the Gnostics in their fundamental doctrine. They considered the order of nature as full of defects and evils, and ascribed it, in consequence, to an imperfect Crea-

* Τὴν δικαιοσύνην τοῦ Θεοῦ κοινωρίαν τινὰ εἶναι μετ' ἰσότητος.
p. 512.

tor. But Epiphanes, it is clear, had no such being in view. He ascribes the constitution of things in the material universe to the Supreme God, whom alone he regards as the Creator. He was, moreover, so far from holding the doctrine of the Gnostics, which identified the Creator with the God of the Jews, that, as quoted by Clement, he considered the command, "Thou shalt not covet," as ridiculous, and more especially the command, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife"; — they being, according to him, directly opposite to the ordinances of the Creator as manifested in his works. Epiphanes, then, was not a Gnostic, nor was his father Carpocrates, from whom he derived his principles, nor the followers of both, by whom they were adopted. Nor had they, I conceive, more title to be considered as Christians.

It is the obvious remark of Clement, that the doctrines alleged clearly subvert the Law and the Gospel. Upon their first aspect, they show themselves to be the doctrines of one who had no deference for the divine authority of Christ. Their advocate, Epiphanes, was, according to Clement, a youth of extraordinary precocity, who died at the age of seventeen, after having been educated by his father in the different branches of knowledge, particularly in

the Platonic philosophy. Clement says that his mother was a native of Cephallenia, and that in Same, a city of that island, a temple was erected to him as a god, and divine honors were paid him after his death. There seems no reasonable ground for doubting this account. There is nothing in it inconsistent with the customs of the Heathens. Clement lived in the same century with Epiphanes, and in the same city in which he was born ; and the facts stated by him are of such a kind as hardly to admit the supposition of any essential mistake concerning them. But the followers of Epiphanes, who paid him divine honors, were evidently Heathens. In conformity with this, Irenæus tells us, that the Carpocratians had images of Christ, together with those of heathen philosophers, as Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle, which they crowned with garlands, and honored after the fashion of the Gentiles.* It appears, therefore, that they placed Christ in the same rank with those philosophers. Some of them, he says, affirmed that they were like Jesus, and some, that in certain respects they were stronger or better.†

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. I. c. 25. § 6. p. 105.

† Ibid. Lib. I. c. 25. § 2. p. 103. Lib. II. c. 32. § 3. p. 165.

Respecting their other opinions, Irenæus states, that they believed that "Jesus was the son of Joseph, and was like other men, except that his soul, being strong and pure, remembered what it had seen in its circumgyration with the unoriginated God."* These conceptions were founded on the doctrine of Plato, who had taught, in his *Phædrus*, the preëxistent immortality of all souls, and that those of the better class had, before their immersion in matter, ascended to the outer orb of heaven, where they had been borne round in company with the gods, and had beheld the eternal Ideas, there presented to view, of which all true knowledge is only a reminiscence.†

* *Cont. Hæres. Lib. I. c. 25. § 1. p. 103.*

† Plato in *Phædro*, p. 245, seqq. (I refer here, as elsewhere, to the pages of Henry Stephen's edition (Paris, 1578), which are commonly numbered in the margin of later editions.) Plato puts the representations there given into the mouth of Socrates. They appear irreconcilable with those concerning the creation, and the preëxistent state, of souls, given in his *Timæus*, p. 41, seqq. But his imaginations at different times were not unfrequently at variance with each other. — The words of Plato, in his *Phædrus*, in speaking of the vision of eternal Ideas presented to preëxistent souls, as borne round on the outer orb of heaven, are so characteristic of ancient philosophy as to be worth quoting. "This supercelestial place," he says, "no poet here on earth has ever celebrated or will celebrate worthily. *But thus it is; for one must dare to describe it truly, especially one who is discoursing of the truth.*" p. 247.

Irenæus, attributing Gnostic conceptions to the Carpocratians, goes on to say, that, according to them, the soul of Jesus being thus excellent, "power was sent it by God to enable it to escape the Makers of the World, and passing through them all, and being wholly liberated, to ascend to him"; and that the same would be the case with all souls who followed his course. This conception of Makers of the World, disposed to impede the ascent of the soul, is Gnostic; but that Irenæus was in error in ascribing it to the Carpocratians may appear by what has been quoted from Epiphanes. It seems to have been not uncommon to attribute incorrectly to one sect opinions held, or reputed to be held, by another. The mistake of Irenæus may have arisen in this way alone; or it may be otherwise accounted for. Through the irregular action of Christianity upon their minds, and the consequent unsettling of their old faith, the Carpocratians may have advanced so far toward the opinions of the catholic Christians, as to regard the inferior gods of the later Platonists, the heathen divinities, as evil spirits; and if this were so, Irenæus might easily confound those inferior gods with the creator-angels of the Gnostics. That such was the case may be conjectured from what he states to have been said by them,

namely, that the soul of Jesus had learned to despise the Makers of the World, in consequence of having been educated among the Jews.* No Gnostic would have represented Jesus as learning to despise the Makers of the World, among whom they commonly regarded the god of the Jews as the chief, in consequence of his being imbued with Jewish notions; but the Carpocratians, if such as we have supposed them, might well have assigned this as a cause for his contempt of the heathen divinities. It can hardly be, that the account of Irenæus is not erroneous.

The morals of the Carpocratians are portrayed in very dark colors by their contemporaries, Irenæus and Clement. They represent the sect as having brought reproach on the Christian name;—upon “us,” says Irenæus, “who have no communion with them either in doctrine, or in morals, or in daily life.”† The Heathens, doubtless, were very ready to impute to Christians the vices and licentiousness of those whose minds had merely been put in action by the new faith, of those bands of out-

* *Jesu autem dicunt animam in Judæorum consuetudine nutritam contempsisse eos [fabricatores mundi].* Lib. I. c. 25. § 1. p. 103.

† Lib. I. c. 25. § 3. p. 103.

laws, who, not belonging to the number of the true followers of our religion, yet accompanied its march, and hovered round its outposts. Some modern writers have been disposed to regard the charges brought against the Carpocratians by their contemporaries as improbable, and in great part unfounded. But their principal argument is, that the Carpocratians were Christians, and that Christians could not have been guilty of such immoralities. If, on the contrary, we regard them as Heathens, on whom the indirect and irregular influence of Christianity had had no other effect than to set them free from the restraints of common opinion, and who, in consequence, were inflated with a notion of their superiority to common prejudices, we shall perceive that they were in the very state in which moral disorders might be expected to break out among them. The charges against them are to a great extent confirmed by the principles of Epiphanes, whom they deified. These are advanced in the broadest manner in the extracts from him given by Clement. He maintained that all laws for the security of private property were in violation of the universal law of God, which had given all things in common to all; and that they alone created the offences which they pun-

ished.* This, indeed, may be considered as little more than a speculative principle, since society imposes such severe penalties on those who act in conformity to it, that none are likely to reduce it to practice from a mere conviction of its truth. But his doctrine respecting the promiscuous intercourse of the sexes, which not only broke down all moral restraint, but represented it as an ordinance of God, is sufficient, especially when we consider the state of society in which it was promulgated, to remove any doubt concerning the truth of the licentiousness of which the Carpocratians were accused. They were heathen philosophers, and Christian chastity was not to be learned from heathen philosophy. They were, as we have supposed, of the school of Plato, and in two of his most noted Dialogues they might have found a mixture of philosophical jargon with nameless impurity.† Nor is there any reason

* Οἱ νόμοι — παρανομεῖν ἐδίδαξαν. Ἡ γὰρ ἰδιότης τῶν νόμων τὴν κοινωνίαν τοῦ θεοῦ νόμου κατέτεμεν καὶ παρατρώγει. — Τό τ' ἐμὸν καὶ τὸ σὸν, φησὶ, διὰ τῶν νόμων παρεισελθεῖν. — Ἡ δὲ κοινωνία παρανομηθεῖσα, καὶ τὰ τῆς ἰσότητος, ἐγέννησε θρεμμάτων καὶ καρπῶν κλέπτῃν. pp. 512, 513.

† I refer to the Phædrus and the Banquet, "amatoria colloquia καὶ παιδεραστικά."

to question what Irenæus says of them,* that they, like the later Platonists, professed the science and practice of magic or theurgy, and used their pretended skill for the purpose of deception.

I HAVE reserved for a separate head the mention of one doctrine which Irenæus imputes to them ; because, so far as it may appear to have been held by any individuals, it connects them in a class with other *pseudo-Christians, maintaining that the practice of scandalous immoralities was a religious duty*. As followers of Plato, the Carpocratians believed the doctrine of the preëxistence and transmigration of souls ; and maintained, says Irenæus, that the soul would not obtain its final liberation from matter till it had been conversant with every kind of life and every mode of action ; that is, as he explains their meaning, till it had been conversant with every kind of impurity and vice.† A strong doubt may at once arise whether such a doctrine could have been professed by any individuals ; and the idea of acting upon it, to

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. I. c. 25. § 3. p. 103. Lib. II. c. 31. § 2. p. 164. c. 32. § 3. p. 165.

† Lib. I. c. 25. § 4. pp. 103, 104. Lib. II. c. 32. § 2. p. 165.

its full extent, appears altogether monstrous and incredible. Irenæus himself says, that he could not believe that their practice corresponded to their principles. What, indeed, were the principles or the practice of certain libertine individuals of the second century, called Carpocratians, whether they were more immoral than some have supposed, or less immoral than their opponents represented, is a subject that may seem wholly uninteresting at the present day. Certainly it is so, as far as justice to their memory is concerned. But, on the other hand, if they held the doctrine imputed to them by Irenæus, or if they held any doctrine which, without being greatly misrepresented, might afford occasion for the statement which he makes, this is a phenomenon in human nature that may well deserve attention.

That they did hold some doctrine of this kind, and that he did not essentially mistake their meaning, may appear from various considerations. Irenæus affirms, that it was expressed in their writings; and that they taught that Jesus had communicated it privately to his Apostles and disciples, and had appointed them to communicate it to those who were worthy and obedient. They would not have maintained that a doctrine concerning morals had been

taught privately, if it had been such as was correspondent to the tenor of the Gospels. He says, that they accommodated to their doctrine the words of our Saviour, "Agree with thine adversary quickly"; representing the adversary as Satan, one of the angels of the world, who would not suffer the soul to obtain its freedom from imprisonment in some mortal body, *till it had paid the uttermost farthing*; that is, according to his explanation, till it had been conversant in all the works of this world. His appeal to their writings, and the particulars which he gives relating to their doctrine, serve to show, that, if his account is not true to the letter, it still had an essential foundation in truth. It is repeated by other writers, particularly by Tertullian, who says,* that they represented "crimes as the tribute which life must pay"; *facinora tributa sunt vitæ*; and notes the same perversion of Scripture that is mentioned by Irenæus.

The doctrine in question, stated in its least offensive form, we may, perhaps, conceive to have been, that the soul must have full experience of this life before passing into another state, and that to this end it must be conver-

* De Animâ, c. 35. p. 291.

sant with pleasures commonly considered criminal. To represent indulgence in such pleasures as a matter of religious obligation was conformable to the teaching of Epiphanes, that promiscuous intercourse of the sexes was an ordinance of God. Irenæus concludes his account of the moral principles of the Carpocratians with saying, that they taught that men were "saved by faith and love, but that other things were indifferent; that, according to the opinions of men, some were accounted good and others bad, but that nothing was bad by nature."* By faith they may have meant a firm adherence to their philosophy; for to souls purified by philosophy Plato assigned the highest places after death. But in what they said of faith and love we may recognize, perhaps, a common tendency of those most licentious in their speculations or their practice to shelter themselves under a show of words expressive of common sentiments or belief.

It may appear, then, that the Carpocratians belonged to the same class with those pseudo-Christians mentioned by Clement of Alexandria, as quoted in the last chapter.† The principle common to them all was, that the practice

* Lib. I. c. 25. § 5. p. 104.

† See pp. 130 - 133.

of scandalous immoralities was a matter of religious obligation. It may be observed, in connection, that the charges brought against them, however general may be the terms in which they are sometimes expressed, evidently relate principally to the vices of sensuality and profligacy.

The avowal of such a principle may strike us at first view as a moral absurdity scarcely credible. But it was in truth a principle with which Paganism had made men familiar, and which it had thoroughly sanctioned. In the heathen worship, gross indecencies, and abominable extravagances and debaucheries, were represented as acceptable to many of their gods, to Bacchus, Venus, Cybele, and Flora ; not to mention other inferior divinities of a still baser character. The public celebration of many of the heathen rites was marked with deep stains of pollution. In Egypt, where brute animals were deified, heathen writers tell us (whether we can believe them or not), that abominations were committed in their worship, with which even those that Epiphanius charges on the heretics whom he most vilifies are not to be compared.*

* Gibbon (Ch. XV. Vol. II. pp. 289 - 294) speaks, in contrast

That such vices as the pseudo-Christians practised might make a part of religion was, therefore, the doctrine of the age. But perhaps the most remarkable analogy with their principles and practice is to be found in those of a sect that has long existed in India; the facts relating to which are so extraordinary as well to deserve notice. Striking analogies also exist, as we shall hereafter see, between the relig-

with the pious horrors and foolish scruples of the early Christians, of "the cheerful devotion," "the agreeable fictions," and "the beautiful mythology" of Paganism; and says, that, "on the days of solemn festivals," "superstition always wore the appearance of pleasure, and often of virtue." He could hardly have used language more unworthy of a philosopher, or less consonant to truth. The pagan mythology, the history of the pagan gods, when viewed in its naked deformity, appears a history of the coarse indulgence of animal propensities, and of acts of fraud, cruelty, and meanness. It everywhere outrages decency and humanity. The better part of the heathen philosophers, with Plato at their head, held it in very different esteem from what Gibbon expresses. The language respecting its fictions which Cicero puts into the mouth of the Stoic, Balbus (*De Naturâ Deorum*, Lib. II. § 28), is among the shortest and mildest of their censures. "*Hæc et dicuntur et creduntur stultissime, et plena sunt futilitatis, summæque levitatis.*" It may be worth while to quote what even Gibbon himself elsewhere says (*Ch. III. Vol. I. 112*): — "We should disgrace the virtues of the Antonines by comparing them with the vices of Hercules or Jupiter. Even the characters of Cæsar or Augustus were far superior to those of the popular deities." The pagan rites were, in great part, conformed to the supposed characters of the divinities worshipped, and often bore direct allusion to the fables concerning them.

ious doctrines of the Hindoos and those of the theosophic Gnostics; and it is not, therefore, strange, that small sects should have shown themselves among the pseudo-Christians and the heathen Gnostics similar to the one referred to in Hindostan, the members of which are called Vámis or Vámácharis. They are worshippers in particular of the Sakti, or female energy, of Siva, hypostatized as the goddess Devi. "The object of their worship is to obtain supernatural powers in this life, and to be identified after death with Siva and Sakti." In their principal ceremonies the Sakti is personified by a naked female; and conformably to the ritual prescribed in their sacred books, and to a very general belief, those ceremonies are "terminated by the most scandalous orgies among the votaries." These are religious observances; "for such practices, if merely for sensual gratification, are held by the sect to be as illicit and reprehensible as they are regarded by any other branch of the Hindoo faith." Such is the account of Professor Wilson.* By another writer it is said, that the Vámácharis "carry the gratification of the

* In the second part of his "Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindoos," published in the "Asiatic Researches," Vol. XVII. (Calcutta, 1832) p. 221, seqq.

senses to an unlimited extent, under the hope, [or] rather under the pretence, of extinguishing them by satiety."* Some further information concerning them may be found in the note below.

The doctrines, precepts, and ritual of the

* See "The Friend of India" (quarterly series), a periodical publication by the missionaries at Serampore. Vol. I. (1821) p. 263, note. In the third volume of the same work, p. 628, seqq., there is an account of the Vámácharis, there called *Veeras*, similar to that given by Professor Wilson. This account of their doctrines and rites is taken from a work under review, published as a religious guide by an opulent native in 1823, being a "Compilation of the Precepts and Doctrines of the Tantras." The author of the article says:—"In the chapter on the three classes of Tantrikes [the followers of the Tantras], the 'beasts,' who abstain from the licentious practices of the others, are aspersed without mercy. The *veeras*, who drink wine, frequent brothels, and live in a delirium of pleasure, are directed to associate with the initiated only, to partake of intoxicating drugs, to be violent and furious in their conduct, to anoint their bodies with ashes like madmen, never to abstain from liquor, to worship the gods with animal and even human sacrifices, and practise the Bhiruvee chukru, a circle in which the followers of the Tantras sit down indiscriminately, without reference to cast, to drink wine and eat flesh." It is said in the Tantras, that "the Vedas, and other writings esteemed sacred by the Hindoos, condemn these actions only when they are performed without previous purifications; when thus purified, they become holy and meritorious."

"The work," continues the author of the article, "advances in licentiousness, as it draws to a close"; and of this he gives sufficient exemplification. But it is not necessary to proceed further in an account of its abominations.

The Vámácharis are also described in Ward's "Account of the
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Vámácharis are given in the Tantras, books to which they ascribe authority superior to that of the Vedas. The existence of such "sacred books," directing the practice of the most impure rites, and enjoining a life which is but one course of vice, as the means of perfection, and of identification after death with the Divinity, may open a new view of human nature, and serve to render credible what we could not else readily believe. Yet the rites observed in the worship of some of the gods of Greece, Rome, and Egypt were in their nature similar to those imposed by the Tantras.

Writings, Religion, and Manners of the Hindoos." (Serampore, 1811.) Chap. IV. Sect. 6. Vol. III. p. 327, seqq.

The directions for the worship of the Sakti are given by Professor Wilson only in the original Sanscrit; and the other writers mentioned refrain from detailing them, as too abominably indecent. Professor Wilson says: — "It is contrary to all knowledge of the human character to admit the possibility of these transactions in their fullest extent; and, though the worship of the Sakti according to the above outline may be sometimes performed, yet there can be little doubt of its being practised but seldom, and then in solitude and secrecy. In truth, few of the ceremonies, there is reason to believe, are ever observed." The Compiler of the Precepts and Doctrines of the Tantras says, that the commands respecting the worship of the Sakti are not binding in this age of iron. (Friend of India, III. 630.) It is agreed, however, that the sect exists at the present day, with some of the tenets and practices described. Professor Wilson, in speaking of the worship of Kali or Dourga as particularly prevalent in Bengal, says, that the rites observed almost place her worshippers among the Vámácharia.

BUT, though we receive as essentially true the accounts of Irenæus and Clement respecting the pseudo-Christians whom we have been considering, we cannot extend the same credit to the outrageous charges brought by writers of the fourth and fifth centuries, particularly by Epiphanius, against some of those whom they represented as heretics. There is a most offensive specimen of them in the account which that writer gives of a pretended sect, to which, with the confusion frequent in his writings, he applies the name of "*Gnostics*," *used, not as a generic, but a specific name.** The origin of his appropriation of the term to a particular sect may be thus explained.

Irenæus speaks of the Gnostics whom he supposes to have existed antecedently to their being split into different sects and called after different leaders, simply under that generic name, and uses the same general name also concerning those whom he does not refer to any particular class. Especially at the conclusion of his first book, after having given an account of the principal Gnostic sects, distinguished by particular names, as referred to their respective leaders, he says, that beside these a

* *Hæres.* XXVI. Opp. I. 82.

multitude of Gnostics arose, whose different doctrines he proceeds to mention, without denoting those who held them by any specific appellations.* Among them were those who were afterwards named Ophians and Cainites. Irenæus likewise says, that the Carpocratians called themselves Gnostics; † by which appropriation of the name, they, of course, meant nothing more than that they were “enlightened men.”

The latter remark of Irenæus has led Eusebius to affirm, after speaking of Simon Magus, Menander, Saturninus, and Basilides, that “Irenæus writes that Carpocrates was the father of another sect, called that of the Gnostics.” ‡ The passage is remarkable, as showing how confused were the notions of Eusebius concerning the earlier heretics, and may lead to the conclusion, that, in his time, they had almost sunk out of notice. In fact, he appears to have had little or no personal knowledge of them, and to have used Irenæus as his principal authority in speaking of them. Him, it seems, he had consulted

* Lib. I. cc. 29–31. p. 107, seqq. — In the first sentence of chapter twenty-ninth, the word “Barbelo” appears to be an interpolation.

† Lib. I. c. 25. § 6.

‡ Hist. Eccles. Lib. IV. c. 7.

so negligently, that among the various sects of Gnostics he thus appropriates the name to one, the Carpocratians,* as if it belonged to them exclusively.

Perhaps, also, Epiphanius misapprehended Irenæus, mistaking his use of the term "Gnostics" as a generic name, in the passages before mentioned, for its use as a specific appellation; and this mistake may have suggested to him the fabrication of his sect of subordinate Gnostics.† But his real purpose, I conceive, in his account of this pretended sect, was to cast odium upon all those heretics who bore the name of Gnostics. Accordingly, in his account he makes no distinction between this sect and the whole body of Gnostics, of which, if the sect existed, it could at most have been regarded only as a subdivision. His accusations stand against Gnostics generally, without any limitation, there being nothing in this part of his work from which it could be inferred that there were other heretics who bore the name besides those of whom he is speaking.

* In appropriating it to the Carpocratians, he differs from Epiphanius, who distinguishes between the Carpocratians and his Gnostics; and who says (Opp. I. pp. 77, 82), that the latter had their origin from the Nicolaitans.

† Hæres. XXVI. Opp. I. 82, seqq.

In conformity with what may be presumed to have been his purpose, he has loaded this fictitious sect (as I conceive it to be) with charges of absurd doctrines, abominable crimes, and loathsome impurities. "Scruples are felt," says Beausobre, "about giving the lie to Epiphanius, who represents this sect as Christians; but, for myself, I feel much stronger scruples against ranking among Christian heretics individuals who were the most profane of men, if what is said of them be true."* Certainly, such individuals as Epiphanius describes could not have been Christians; but it may further be observed, that his authority is not of a kind to afford ground for believing that such individuals ever existed, supposing their existence possible. Epiphanius is a writer as deficient in plausibility, as in decency and veracity. He has in an extraordinary manner implicated his own character in his account; for, after describing practices which no mind not thoroughly corrupt could regard as other than ineffably odious, he asserts that he had gained his knowledge from women belonging to the sect, who, in his youth, had endeavoured to corrupt his virtue and seduce him to

* *Histoire de Manichée et du Manichéisme*, Tome II. p. 68.

join it;* that he had been under strong temptation, but that God in his mercy had delivered him, in answer to his prayers and groans; and that then he had denounced the members of the sect, whose names had before been unknown, to the "bishops in that place" (what bishops, or what place, he does not specify), and that "the city" (a nameless city) had in consequence been purged by the banishment of about eighty individuals.†

WHILE, however, we reject in the gross the account of Epiphanius, as not true of any body of men, it does not follow that it is throughout a mere fabrication. There may have been in his age crazy and vicious fanatics, more or less resembling the Vāmācharis of India, who afforded a certain foundation for it. Some facts are also to be discovered in what Epiphanius has brought together. He mentions and quotes a book of some interest, of which he affords the only account, and concerning which there seems no reason to suspect him of mistake or falsehood. It was called the "Gospel of Eve,"

* According to his own account, he was acquainted with the private sign by which the members of the sect recognized each other. *Hæres.* XXVI. § 4. pp. 85, 86.

† *Hæres.* XXVI. § 17. pp. 99, 100.

as containing the wisdom which Eve had learned from the Serpent.* That it was so called is one among the many proofs which make evident what we shall hereafter have occasion to observe, that the title "Gospel" did not imply that a book to which it was given was a history of the ministry of Jesus. But this book is an object of curiosity for another reason. It appears from the single passage of it extant, quoted by Epiphanius, to have been founded on the Egyptian pantheism. Conformably to this, he says,† that those who used it believed that "the *same* soul is dispersed in animals, and insects, and fishes, and serpents, and men, and in herbs and trees and fruits." The passage from the Gospel of Eve is to the following effect. ‡ The writer, or the person represented as speaking, says, — "I stood on a high mountain, and I saw a man of large stature, and another mutilated; and I heard, as it were, a voice of thunder, and I drew near to hearken, and it spoke to me and said, 'I am thou, and thou art I; and wherever thou mayest be, there am I; and I am dispersed in all things; and from whatever place thou wouldst collect me, in collecting me thou art collecting thyself.'"

* Ibid. § 2. p. 84.

† Ibid. § 9. p. 90.

‡ Ibid. § 3. p. 84.

What the two figures were intended to symbolize cannot, I think, be conjectured with any probability. But the words uttered appear evidently to be an expression of the pantheistic doctrine, according to which all individual beings are but parts of the one, sole, self-subsistent being, the Universe. There is, perhaps, in the passage, an allusion to the fable of the mutilation of the body of Osiris by Typhon, and the collection of his members by Isis, which, when the absurdities of ancient mythology were transformed by the philosophers of later times into allegories, was mystically explained, as symbolizing the discription and disappearance of Ideas, the essential forms of things, the body of Osiris, through the action of the destructive powers of nature, personified as Typhon, and their being collected anew and readapted to their purpose by the receptive and nutritive powers typified by Isis.* The analogy, also, is striking between the words said to be uttered and the inscription which Plutarch reports to have been engraved on the temple of Isis at Saïs: — “I am all that has been, is, or will be” ;† Isis being here per-

* Plutarch. *De Iside et Osiride*, § 53. *Moral. Tom. II.* pp. 596, 597. Edit. Wytenbach.

† *Ibid.* § 9. p. 463. Plutarch concludes the inscription thus : —
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sonified as Universal Nature. It is to be observed, that there is great confusion in the Egyptian mythology, the same attributes being ascribed to different divinities. This confusion

“ And my veil no mortal has ever lifted.” Proclus gives it with a different ending. That it was actually to be found on or in the temple at Sais is very doubtful. But as regards our present purpose the question is unimportant; since the report of Plutarch sufficiently shows the existence of this conception of Isis long before Epiphanius’s notice of the Gospel of Eve. See, respecting this inscription, Jablonski’s *Pantheon Ægyptiorum*, P. I. Lib. I. c. 3. § 7. and Mosheim’s notes in his Latin translation of Cudworth’s *Intellectual System*, Tom. I. p. 510, seqq., and p. 522. Edit. secund. In the last note Mosheim gives the correct reading of another remarkable inscription to Isis of similar import, found at Capua, which is to this effect: — “ *Aerrius Balbinus dedicates thee [that is, a part of the universe, a stone] to thyself, who art one and all things, the goddess Isis.*”

It may here be observed, that Cudworth should be read with the notes of Mosheim; unless, indeed, one be so acquainted with the philosophy and religion of the ancients, and so accustomed to reasoning, and to estimating the power and the ambiguity of language, as to be able to correct for himself his deceptive representations. He deserves the highest praise for integrity as a writer; his learning was superabundant, and his intellect vigorous enough to wield it to his purpose. But he transfers his own religious conceptions to the heathen philosophers and religionists, he infuses the sentiments of a modern theist into their words, and he confounds together the doctrines of those who preceded Christianity and of those who were powerfully acted upon by its influence. He thus spreads a luminous cloud over the ancient heathen theology, which Mosheim has done something to dispel. Mosheim has likewise corrected many of the other errors of fact, or mistakes of judgment, which run through the mass of Cudworth’s learning; and has added much to illustrate the topics of which he treats.

probably originated from the fact that one god was the peculiar object of veneration in one place, and another in another, so that the highest attributes were in different places ascribed to different gods ; but it was at once both solved and aggravated by the mystical theology, which taught that they were all only manifestations of Universal Nature,—each of them but different names for the “One and All,” considered under different relations.

From the title of the book mentioned by Epiphanius, that is, from its being called a “gospel,” from the circumstance that he ascribes its use to an heretical sect, and from the account given by him of the pantheistic opinions of this sect, we may infer that there were individuals who blended conceptions borrowed from Christianity with the Egyptian mythology and pantheism, and who have been improperly represented as Christian heretics. Pseudo-Christians of like character appear to have existed in Egypt at an early period. We have some information, such as it is, concerning this subject in a curious letter of Hadrian, preserved by the Pagan historian Vopiscus.* The Emperor says : — “ Egypt, my dear Servian, which

* In his *Life of Saturninus*.

you recommended to me, I have found to be light, vacillating, and borne about by every rumor. Those who worship Serapis are Christians; and those who call themselves Christian bishops are devoted to Serapis. There is no ruler of a Jewish synagogue, no Samaritan, no Christian priest, who is not an astrologer, a diviner, a leader of a sect.* The Patriarch † himself, when he comes to Egypt, is forced by some to worship Serapis, and by others, Christ." The Emperor may not have had the best opportunities for obtaining information respecting the state of religion among the Egyptians, and he may have trusted too much to the jeers of his courtiers; but notwithstanding this, and notwithstanding the levity and obvious extravagance

* "A leader of a sect." The Latin word is *alipies*, which means an *anointer*, one who anoints those who have bathed, or the combatants for the arena. But, as it is not easy to perceive any appropriateness in this meaning, I have ventured to render the word in a sense of the Greek ἀλειπτης, which is used metaphorically to signify an *inciter* or *leader*. Perhaps the Emperor wrote the word in Greek letters. But after all, in using the expressions which he does, *mathematicus*, *haruspex*, *alipies*, he may have had in mind a line in Juvenal's description of a needy Greek adventurer (Sat. III. 76), — "Grammaticus, rhetor, geometres, pictor, alipies"; and may thus, in employing the word *alipies*, have intended only an expression of contempt.

† The Patriarch of the Jews must be meant; as the title and dignity of Patriarch were not known in the Christian church till long after the time of Hadrian.

of his letter, we cannot suppose that what he says was wholly without foundation. Some state of things existed in Egypt, in the first half of the second century, which gave occasion to his representation. The minds of many, it may be presumed, were affected by Christianity, who had but a very imperfect knowledge of what Christianity was, and some of whom combined it very grossly with their former errors.

It seems probable that the book mentioned by Epiphanius, the Gospel of Eve, containing the wisdom which Eve learned from the Serpent, had its origin among certain reputed heretics, who, according to Origen, were not Christians. They were called *Ophians* or *Ophites* (we might render the name *Serpentists*), from the Greek word *ὄφις*, a serpent; because, as Origen says, they took the part of the Serpent who seduced Eve, and represented him as having given good counsel to our first parents.* Irenæus, in one of the last chapters of his first book, † before referred to, ‡ gives an account of the doctrines of a certain sect not named by him, but which, as is evident from a comparison with Origen and

* Origen. cont. Celsum. Lib. VI. § 28. Opp. I. pp. 651, 652.

† Cap. 30.

‡ See p. 212.

other subsequent writers, was that of the Ophians. Nothing entitled to much credit is added by the later historians of the heretics to the notices of Irenæus and Origen.

Origen's mention of them is incidental. There is no reason to distrust its essential correctness, but he enters into no general exposition of their system. The account of Irenæus is confused and improbable, and appears to have been put together from imperfect and inconsistent sources of information. The statements respecting them by him and by the other writers who speak of them as heretics, as the author of the Addition to Tertullian, Epiphanius, and Theodoret, when taken in connection, present a system of absurdities so palpably irreconcilable, that no sect could have professed it for their creed. We may compare it to a machine composed of parts of various others, interfering among themselves in such a manner, that evidently it could never have been in operation.

We can therefore admit, with any confidence, only some very general conclusions respecting the doctrines of the Ophians.* Whether Chris-

* See the account of Irenæus, as before referred to, Lib. I. c. 30 ; and that of Origen in his work, *Against Celsus*, Lib. VI. Opp. I. pp. 648 - 661. Lib. VII. pp. 722, 723. Lib. III. p. 455.

tians or not, they appear to have been of the class of theosophic Gnostics, holding very disparaging opinions of the Creator, whom they regarded as the god of the Jews. They believed that he, with six other powers produced by him, informed and ruled seven spheres surrounding the earth (those of the sun and of the planets known to the ancients) ; and that through these spheres the soul had to pass after death in its ascent to the Spiritual World. The way, which might otherwise be barred by those powers, was open to such as were initiated in their mysteries, and had learned the proper invocations which the soul must address to them in its ascent, to obtain its passage. Their doctrines have the appearance of being a caricature of the doctrines of the proper Gnostics. Maintaining the common opinion that the Creator was *not spiritual*, and regarding him as being opposed to the manifestation and development of the spiritual principle in man, they honored the Serpent for having thwarted his narrow purposes, withdrawn our first parents from their allegiance to him, induced them to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and thus brought them the knowledge of "that Power which is over All." By a serpent the Phœnicians and Egyptians are said to have symbolized the Agathodæmon, the benevolent

power in nature (the god Cneph of the Egyptians) ; * and the Ophians, perhaps, regarded the Serpent under the same aspect. Clement of Alexandria once incidentally mentions the Ophians, in speaking of the origin of the names of different sects. Some, he says, are denominated "from their systems and from the objects they honor, as the Cainists and the Ophians." † The Cainists or Cainites (whom we shall have occasion to notice hereafter) are represented as magnifying Cain. The Ophians honored the Serpent.

Nothing concerning the Ophians would seem to be better established than this fact. But it is not stated by Irenæus. On the contrary, according to his account of their system, the Serpent was originally vicious, produced by the Creator in the dregs of matter, and treacherous to him. Afterwards, indeed, he appears employed by *Sophia* or Wisdom, the offspring of the Unknown God, the mother, but adversary of the Creator, for the purpose of seducing our first parents to eat of the forbidden fruit ; by which they obtained a knowledge of the Supreme Divinity. But the Creator, who was himself de-

* Eusebii Præparatio Evangelica, Lib. I. c. 10.

† Stromat. VII § 17. p. 900.

sirous of being regarded as the highest God, being in consequence angry with the Serpent, expelled him from heaven, where he had before dwelt, and cast him down to earth. After this fall he is made to correspond to the serpent of the Apocalypse, the Devil; and is represented as producing six other evil Powers (answering to the six subordinate Powers of the Creator), and as being, together with them, full of malice equally toward men and their Maker.

But we have good reason to believe that Iræneus, our earliest, and one of our two principal authorities, has fallen into great errors respecting the system of the Ophians, when we find him saying, notwithstanding what has been stated, that they affirmed the Serpent to be "the *Nous* (Intellect) himself"; * for this was the name by which theosophic Gnostics designated their first emanation from the Supreme Being. Elsewhere he says, that some of the Ophians maintained that Wisdom herself became the Serpent.† And in connection with this we cannot but be struck with the intrinsic improbability of the scheme that he ascribes to the sect; according to which the Devil was employed for the purpose of communicating spiritual wisdom and

* Lib. I. c. 30. § 5. p. 110.

† Ibid. § 15. p. 112.

a knowledge of the true God to our first parents. These, however, are but some of the inconsistencies that present themselves in the system that he has depicted.

That the Ophians held the Serpent in honor appears from the testimony of Clement and Origen, the indications furnished by Irenæus himself, the reports of later writers, and the evidence of their distinguishing name. Epiphanius says, that they glorified the Serpent as God, or as a god, and affirmed him to be Christ; * though, at the same time, with the grossest inconsistency, of which he seems to have had some indistinct consciousness, he gives a mutilated variation of the account of Irenæus by which the Serpent is identified with the Devil.† The same inconsistency exists in the relation of the author of the Addition to Tertullian, who follows Irenæus in part, but affirms that the Ophians placed the Serpent above Christ.‡ And Theodoret, who, I think, was embarrassed by the contradictions of his predecessors, says, that some of the Ophians worshipped the Serpent.§

* Indic. in Tom. III. Lib. I. p. 229. Hæres. XXXVII. §§ 1, 2. pp. 268, 269. § 5. pp. 271, 272.

† Ibid. §§ 4, 5. pp. 271, 272.

‡ Apud Tertullian. Opp. § 47. p. 220.

§ Hæret. Fab. Lib. I. n. 14. p. 205.

Modern writers have, in consequence, conjectured, either that there were two sorts of Ophians, or that there were two Serpents in their system, one celestial and the other terrestrial. But it would have been strange, if two classes of persons, one honoring the Serpent as a god, and the other regarding him as the Devil, had both been comprehended under the same name ; and as for the conjecture of two Serpents, it is certain that Irenæus, and the other ancient writers who mention the Ophians, speak only of one. A general solution of this and of other difficulties concerning them is to be found in the obscurity of the sect, in the consequent ignorance and inaccuracy of the reporters of their doctrines, and in the great probability that these doctrines were little settled among themselves.

Our purpose does not require us to enter further into the detail of their system, and to force our way through the crude accounts of ancient, and the hypotheses of modern writers. The labor would in any case be unprofitable. It may be the duty of one exploring these difficult subjects to spend his own time in pursuing obscure paths, tangled with briers, till he is satisfied that they lead to nothing ; but it can seldom be worth while to conduct others over

the same ground, that they may enjoy a like gratification.

The accounts of the Ophians belong, for the most part, to the fabulous history of the Gnostics. Nor should I have dwelt even so long upon this obscure and insignificant sect (for such we shall perceive it to have been), were it not for its having been magnified into importance by the discussions concerning it in modern times, and, still more, if it were not for the relation in which Origen says the Ophians stood to Christianity.

He speaks of them in his work against Celsus. Celsus had charged Christians with calling the Creator "an accursed god,"* upon the ground, as appears, that this was done by the Ophians; for it was his custom to accuse Christians of the extravagances and errors of heretical and pseudo-Christian sects. But Origen says in reply, that the Ophians were so far from being Christians, that they spoke of Jesus not less reproachfully than did Celsus himself, that they admitted no one into their fellowship without pronouncing curses against him, and that they were unwilling to hear his name even

* Ὡς ἄρα Χριστιανοὶ λέγουσι καταραμένον θεὸν τὸν δημιουργόν.
Contra Cels. Lib. VI. § 28. Opp. I. 651.

as that of a wise and virtuous man.* Origen calls them a very obscure sect,† and speaks of their number as very small; there being, he says, none or very few remaining.‡ Celsus had brought forward a symbolical diagram, having reference to the ascent of the soul through the seven spheres of the Creator and his angels; and Origen is principally occupied by an account of this diagram, and the prayers inscribed upon it. It bore names given to the seven Powers, barbarous to Grecian ears, borrowed partly from the Old Testament, and partly, according to Origen, from the art of magic.§ But he says, that, though he had travelled much, and everywhere sought the acquaintance of men professing to know any thing, yet he had never met with any one who professed to explain it.||

In a passage antecedent to what I have quoted, Origen says, — “Celsus seems to me to have become acquainted with some sects that have no fellowship with us even in the name of Jesus. Thus, perhaps, he has heard of the Ophians or the Cainites, or of some others,

* Ibid. p. 652.

† Ibid. § 24. p. 648.

‡ Ibid. § 26. p. 650.

§ Ibid. § 32. pp. 656, 657.

|| Οὐδενὶ γοῦν περιτετεύχαμεν πρεσβεύοντι τὰ τοῦ διαγράμματος.
Ibid. § 24. p. 648.

holding doctrines wholly foreign from those of Jesus." *

Origen's account of the insignificance of the sect of the Ophians is confirmed, if it need confirmation, by the facts, that they are not *named* by Irenæus, nor are their peculiar doctrines referred to in his long confutation of different heresies, which forms the greater part of his work; that they are but once incidentally mentioned, as we have seen, by Clement of Alexandria; and that they are not noticed at all by Tertullian. Their want of notoriety appears likewise from the uncertainty respecting their name. None is given them by Irenæus. By Clement and Origen they are called Ophians (*Οφιανοί*); by Epiphanius, and some Latin writers who mention them, Ophites (*Οφίται*). Theodoret speaks of them as "Sethians, or Ophians, or Ophites"; † but Epiphanius and others make quite a distinct sect of the Sethians,‡ and the probability is, that no proper sect ever existed under this name.§ The obscurity of the Ophi-

* Cont. Cels. Lib. III. § 13. p. 455.

† Hæret. Fab. Lib. I. n. 14. p. 204.

‡ They are the thirty-ninth Heresy of Epiphanius. Opp. I. 284.

§ The Sethians have been mentioned before (p. 32, note). I conceive, that "Sethians" was, as there explained, only a name by which some of the Gnostics denoted *the spiritual*; Seth being

ans is made still more evident by the very confused and inconsistent accounts of their doctrines, accounts such as would not have been given of those of any well-known sect.*

There is, as we have seen, a disagreement between Origen on the one side, and Irenæus

regarded as their progenitor or prototype. Thus, in the *Doctrina Orientalis* (n. 54. p. 982), it is said, that "from Adam are produced three natures: the first irrational, of which was Cain; the second rational and righteous, of which was Abel; and the third spiritual, of which was Seth"; and Seth is then represented as producing a spiritual offspring, "whose citizenship is in heaven, and whom this world cannot contain." Irenæus gives a similar account of the opinions of the Valentiniæans concerning the division of men into three kinds, corresponding to Cain, Abel, and Seth. (Lib. I. c. 7. § 5. p. 35.)

* Yet Matter, in his *Histoire Critique du Gnosticisme* (II. 260), states, in direct contradiction to all evidence and probability, that "the Ophites were equally celebrated and numerous"; and (p. 184) that, being "familiar with the doctrines of ancient Egypt, and those of the ancient East, as well as with Judaism and Christianity, they undertook to do justice to all the truth contained in these systems; they availed themselves of their myths, their symbols, and their teachings, and at the same time regarded all these doctrines, which were insufficient for them, as subordinate to the authority of a superior science, revealed to them through a more pure and direct communication with the world of intelligences."

I have quoted the work of Matter once before, and shall have occasion to quote it once again. It may not be wholly useless to give a few specimens of the manner in which the subject of the Gnostics has been treated, and of what have been presented as the last results of the inquiries respecting it.

and subsequent writers on the other, concerning the relation in which the Ophians stood to Christianity. Irenæus represents them as Christian heretics, Origen as an antichristian sect. The difference would have been of no account, if Origen had merely said that they were not Christians. According to Irenæus, they held that their doctrines were not openly taught by Christ, but that Jesus, whom they distinguished from Christ, remaining on earth eighteen months after his resurrection, then communicated them to a few of his disciples, who had capacity for such great mysteries.* Thus founding a system of their own invention on a supposititious basis, they might well be considered as not Christians. But Origen says, that they pronounced curses against Jesus. With so slight a hold as they had upon Christianity, and probably with no very fixed belief, they may have passed through a natural process of deterioration, during the interval between Irenæus and Origen. There is nothing improbable in the supposition, that a vain and foolish sect should first claim to be a sort of transcendental Christians, and then, finding themselves contemned by the great body of believers, and perceiving that their specula-

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. I. c. 30. § 14. p. 112.

tions were only embarrassed by their pretended faith, should have determined to rely on their own spiritual wisdom alone, and should have openly professed their rejection of Christianity with something of the spleen of apostates.

This is an obvious solution of the disagreement between Origen and Irenæus. But perhaps we are to look still farther for an explanation of it. With more or less analogy to other later sects, the theosophic Gnostics believed that they were guided to the truth by the divine light within, that spiritual nature which they considered as peculiar to themselves. Their systems consequently were the truth. They were derived from a higher source than reasoning, and were not amenable to it. They could be judged of only by those whose spiritual apprehensions were conformed to their reception. These principles, it is true, were not consistently acted upon. The Gnostics appear to have reasoned as well as they were able; and, as we shall hereafter see, were even reputed in their day subtile reasoners from the Scriptures. The claim of a higher internal source of knowledge, of the nature and operations of which reason is not the judge, is commonly resorted to only when all other modes of proof fail. Men do not condemn the aid of reason before it is with-

drawn. But it was the tendency of the self-confident state of mind which characterized the Gnostics, to lead them to reject instruction from without. A true Gnostic was his own teacher; and though he found his system in the Gospel, yet his own mind was the book in which it was first read. Christianity was likely thus to become, in his view, an abstraction, the name for a body of opinions and imaginations, which he had embraced because he knew them to be true, independently of what others regarded as evidence of the divine authority of our religion. To him, indeed, its evidence might be merely its conformity to the revelations of his own spiritual nature; and from such a state of mind the transition was easy to the proper infidelity ascribed to the Ophians.

Together with this, the theosophic Gnostics, generally, distinguished between the being who appeared as a man, Jesus, the son of the Creator, and the celestial being, Christ, or the Saviour, or the spiritual Jesus, who at the baptism of the former descended into him from the *Pleroma*.* To use the words of Tertullian, they

* *Irenæus*. Lib. I. c. 7. § 2. pp. 32, 33. Lib. III. c. 10. § 4. p. 186. Ibid. c. 11. §§ 1, 3. pp. 188, 189. *Conf.* Lib. I. c. 2. § 6. pp. 12, 13.

“made Christ and Jesus different beings ; the one had escaped from the midst of multitudes, the other was apprehended ; the one in the solitude of a mountain, overshadowed by a cloud, had been resplendent before three witnesses, the other, with no mark of distinction, had held common intercourse with men ; the one was magnanimous, but the other trembling ; and, at last, Jesus had been crucified, and Christ had risen.” * It was the Christ of the Pleroma whom they regarded as the teacher of divine truth ; and those truths which were most mysterious and transcendent they conceived him to have taught in secret meanings and enigmas, and in mere intimations and allusions, recorded in the Gospels, and in private unrecorded discourses addressed only to those capable of comprehending them. But the system of the Ophians appears throughout as a coarse exaggeration of the doctrines of the theosophic Gnostics. In common with those Gnostics, they regarded Jesus as the son of the Creator. But of the Creator they gave the most disparaging representations, and are said to have pronounced him accursed. It is not, then, difficult to believe that they extended like enmity to his son ; nor is

* De Carne Christi, c. 24. p. 325.

there any thing very improbable in supposing that they might have pretended to be, in some sort, followers of Christ, while they rejected Jesus as a divine teacher, and even proceeded to the extravagance, mentioned by Origen, of pronouncing curses on his name.* Thus in our own day, among the theologians of Germany, we may find speculations concerning an abstract, an ideal, or a symbolical Christ, who is an object of faith, while the history of Jesus is regarded as fabulous.

FROM what has been said, it may appear that sects and individuals who are not to be considered as Christians have been erroneously reckoned among the Gnostics. Nor is their existence difficult to be accounted for. Christianity soon became an object of universal attention. It was a new phenomenon in the intellectual world. A power unknown before was in ac-

* This solution of the disagreement between Origen and Irænaeus implies the incorrectness of the account of the latter writer (already quoted, p. 232), that the Ophians affirmed that *Jesus* after his resurrection taught, for eighteen months, the mysteries of their doctrines to those who were capable of receiving them. But, besides the contradiction to Origen, the whole account of Irænaeus (Lib. I. c. 30. §§ 12, 13, 14. pp. 111, 112) respecting the agency of *Christ* and of *Jesus* in the system of the Ophians is too obscure and incongruous to be entitled to much consideration.

tion, and spreading its influence far beyond the sphere to which it might seem to be confined. Our religion essentially affected the heathen philosophy contemporary with it, and introduced into it conceptions such as had not been previously entertained. The doctrines of our faith were, undoubtedly, more or less known to many who had not studied them in the Gospels, nor were acquainted with its evidences as a revelation from God. Though not received by such as of divine authority, and but imperfectly understood, they gave a new impulse to thought. Men's minds were thrown into a state of effervescence, new affinities operated, and new combinations of opinion were formed. There were, doubtless, those whose vanity prompted them to profess an acquaintance with the new barbaric philosophy, as they deemed it, and to represent themselves as having exercised a critical and discriminating judgment upon it, and as having discovered in it certain important views, and certain truths not before developed. In some of those affected by our religion, their imperfect and heartless knowledge of it would be rather destructive than renovating, breaking down all barriers of thought, and opening the way for wild speculations. Hence, as we may easily believe, new systems of opinion sprung up,

not Christian, but deriving some characteristic peculiarities from Christianity, — the systems held by those whom we have called pseudo-Christians.

BUT how, it may be asked, came the pseudo-Christians to be confounded with Christian heretics? Various considerations afford an answer to this question. As I have remarked, no well-defined boundary was apparent between the two classes. They passed insensibly into each other. In the reliance of the Gnostics upon the revelations of their own spiritual nature, we may perceive a tendency to infidelity. It was an error which would lead many to undervalue, and some to reject, the authority of Christ. The pseudo-Christians were reckoned among the Gnostics, because many of them held Gnostic opinions; and such opinions were attributed even to those, the Carpocratians, by whom they were not held. Another cause of this confusion may be found in the fact, that the Heathens would naturally blend together in one general class all those who, breaking away from the old forms of philosophy, were evidently involved in the new movement in the intellectual world produced by Christianity. The enemies of our religion charged upon Christians what might be truly or

falsely said of such sectaries as we have been considering. And, on the other hand, the catholic Christians, regarding the Gnostics as not true believers, as not belonging to the Christian body, were not careful to discriminate between them and those who, though corresponding with them in many respects, had yet no title to the Christian name. Hence it was, we may conceive, that the Gnostics were classed with individuals whose doctrines and whose lives many of them regarded with as strong disapprobation as did the catholic Christians.

IN the preceding chapters we have taken a general view of the Gnostics, and of their relation to the catholic Christians. We have traced their external history, and attended to the respective characters of those writers from whom our knowledge of them is derived. We have considered their morals, — an essential point in determining how far they may be regarded as sincere though erroneous believers; and we have discriminated them from sectaries with whom they have been confounded, who, though borrowing some conceptions from Christianity, were not Christians.

It has been suggested, likewise, that the oc-

casion of Gnosticism was to be found in the aversion of the Gentiles to Judaism, in the form in which it was presented to their minds ; and to this subject we will next attend.

CHAPTER VI.

ON Gnosticism, considered as a separation of Judaism
from Christianity.

“EVERY heretic, as far as I know,” says Tertullian, “ridicules the whole of the Old Testament.”* “To separate the Law from the Gospel,” he observes in another place, “is the special and principal object of Marcion.”† “The labor of the heretics,” he says, “is not in building up an edifice of their own, but in destroying the truth. They undermine ours to erect their own. Take away from them the Law of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Creator God, and they will have nothing to urge against us.”‡ “It is the case with all those,” says Irenæus, “who hold pernicious doctrines, that, being influenced by the opinion that the Law of Moses is different from and contrary to the doctrine of the Gospel, they have not turned

* *Advers. Marcion. Lib. V. c. 5. p. 467.*

† *Ibid. Lib. I. c. 19. p. 374.*

‡ *De Præscriptione Hæreticorum, c. 42. p. 217.*

to consider the causes of the difference between the two Testaments.” *

Origen, in maintaining the necessity of interpreting the Scriptures allegorically, says, that many have fallen into great errors from not understanding them in their spiritual sense. He first instances the unbelieving Jews, who, he says, rejected the Messiah in consequence of interpreting the prophecies concerning him literally. He then proceeds thus : — “ The heretics too, when they read, *A fire has blazed from my wrath* ; † — *I am a jealous God, requiting the sins of fathers upon children to the third and fourth generation* ; ‡ — *I repent that I have anointed Saul to be king* ; § — *I am the God who makes peace and creates evil* ; || — and, in another place, *There is no evil in a city which the Lord hath not wrought* ; ¶ — and yet further, *Evil came down from the Lord to the gates of Jerusalem* ; ** — and, *An evil spirit from the Lord tormented Saul* ; †† — when they read these and ten thousand other similar passages,

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. III. c. 12. § 12. p. 198.

† Jeremiah xv. 14.

‡ Exodus xx. 5.

§ 1 Samuel xv. 11.

|| Isaiah xlv. 7.

¶ Amos iii. 6., so quoted by Origen.

** Micah i. 19.

†† 1 Samuel xvi. 14.

they do not indeed venture to reject the divine origin of the Scriptures [the Jewish Scriptures], but they believe them to have proceeded from the Creator whom the Jews worship. Regarding him, in consequence, as imperfect and not good, they think that the Saviour came to make known the more perfect God, who, they affirm, is not the Creator. Holding various opinions concerning this subject, and having deserted the Creator, who is the unoriginated only God, they have given themselves up to their own fabrications; and have formed mythological systems, according to which they explain the production of things visible, and of other things, invisible, the existence of which they have imagined. But indeed," continues Origen, "the more simple of those who boast that they belong to the church, who regard none as superior to the Creator, and in this do well, have yet such conceptions of him as are not to be entertained of the most cruel and most unjust of men," — in consequence, as he immediately remarks, of their understanding the Jewish Scriptures, not "according to their spiritual sense, but according to the naked letter." *

"The most ungodly and irreligious among the

* *De Principiis*, Lib. IV. § 8. Opp. I. 164, seqq.

heretics," says Origen in his Commentary on Leviticus, "not understanding the difference between *visible* Judaism and *intelligible* Judaism, that is, between Judaism in its outward form and Judaism in its hidden purport, have at once separated themselves from Judaism, and from the God who gave these Scriptures and the whole Law, and have fabricated for themselves another God beside him who gave the Law and the Prophets, and made heaven and earth." *

Of the opinions of Ptolemy, the Valentinian, respecting the Jewish Law, we have a detailed account in his Letter to Flora, which he seems to have intended as a sort of introduction to Gnosticism, — as an exposition and defence of its fundamental doctrine. He begins by stating, that some believe the Law to have been ordained by God the Father, and others by the Adversary, Satan. Both opinions he rejects as altogether erroneous. It could not have proceeded from the Perfect God and Father; because it is imperfect, and contains commands unsuitable to the nature and will of such a God; nor, on the other hand, can the Law, which forbids iniquity, be ascribed to the Evil Being. His own opinion, he conceives, may be proved

* Philocalia, c. 1. ad finem. Opp. II. 193.

by the words of Christ, to which alone he says we may safely trust in investigating the subject. It is, that the Law contained in the Pentateuch does not proceed from a single lawgiver, consequently not from the god of the Jews alone. A part of it is to be ascribed to him ; another part was given by Moses on his own authority ; and a third portion consists of laws interpolated by the Elders of the people. In proof that some laws proceeded from Moses alone, he quotes the words of Christ, — “ *Moses on account of the hardness of your hearts permitted you to put away your wives ; but in the beginning it was not so, for God established the connection, and what the Lord has joined together, let no man put asunder.* ” * To the laws interpolated by the Elders he regards Christ as referring, when he taught the Jews that they had set aside the Law of God by the traditions of their Elders.† Of that portion of the Law which he ascribes to the god of the Jews, some of the precepts, according to him, are wholly unmixed with evil. They constitute the Law properly so called, that Law which the Saviour came not to destroy, but to perfect. They are those of the Decalogue.‡

* Matt. xix. 4 – 8.

† Mark vii. 3 – 9.

‡ There is here, apparently, an example of that inconsistency

Other precepts have a mixture of something bad and wrong, and were abrogated by the Saviour. Such, for instance, is the law respecting retaliation, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." A third class, consisting of the ceremonial law, relates to things typical of those to come, more spiritual and excellent, in the Christian dispensation. Why the laws of the god of the Jews should contain types of Christianity, Ptolemy does not explain in this Letter. He probably accounted for it through a secret influence from the Pleroma, under which, as we shall hereafter see, the Creator was represented by the Valentinians as acting.

Ptolemy next proceeds to answer the inquiry, Who was that god who gave the Law? He was not, he repeats, the Perfect God, nor was he Satan; but he was the Fashioner and Maker of this World, and of the beings contained in it, not good (that is, not possessing unmingled

of which we find so much in the theological speculations of the ancients. Christ, according to Ptolemy, retained and perfected "the ten commandments." But Ptolemy believed these to have been given, not by the Supreme Being, but by the god of the Jews. Now the first of them is, "Thou shalt have no other God beside me"; a command which, according to his system, it is impossible that Christ should have confirmed, since Ptolemy regarded him as having come to reveal another and far greater God than the god of the Jews.

goodness), like the Supreme God, nor evil and wicked like Satan; but standing in the midst between them, one who may properly be called Just, as one who rewards and punishes according to his measure of goodness; not unoriginated, like the Supreme God, but being an image of him.

In this account of his opinions, Ptolemy probably gives as favorable a view as was entertained by any Gnostic of the Jewish Law, and of the god of the Jews.

It is to be observed, that the Gnostics did not reject the Pentateuch, and the other books of the Old Testament, as unworthy of credit. On the contrary, their system was founded on the supposition, that those books contained a correct account of the Jewish dispensation, and of the events connected with it. Difficulties and objections then pressed upon them. There was much that offended their reason, their moral sentiments, and their prejudices as Gentiles. Receiving the history as true, and understanding it in its obvious sense, they could not believe that the god of the Jews was the same being as the God of Christians. Thus they were led to separate the Law from the Gospel, and to introduce the agency of another being, wholly distinct from the Supreme God, in the govern-

ment of the world. The corner-stone of Gnosticism was thus laid.

BUT in regarding many of the representations given of God in the Old Testament as unworthy of the Supreme Being, the Gnostics did not stand alone. The more intelligent of the catholic Christians contemporary with them strongly felt and expressed these and other objections to which the Old Testament was, in their view, exposed, if understood in its obvious sense. This feeling is shown in the quotations before given from Origen, and the subject well deserves further consideration ; for there are few of more importance in the history of Christian opinions.

IN a Note to this volume * there is some notice of the opinions of the author of the Clementine Homilies concerning the Old Testament. A great part of that work is directed against the doctrines of the Gnostics, represented as maintained by Simon Magus. There is much relating to the objections to the god of the Jews (that is, in the view of the writer, to the Supreme God), which the Gnostics derived from

* See Additional Note, B.

the Old Testament ; and of these objections the author, under the person of Peter, presents a bold solution. He gives up at once to reprobation the passages on which they were founded, maintaining that they are false representations of God. He represents them as existing in the Jewish Scriptures, through the permitted agency of Satan, to serve as a test for distinguishing between those who are, and those who are not, willing to believe evil concerning God.* According to him, what in those Scriptures is accordant with right conceptions of God is to be received as true, and what is not so is to be rejected as false.† His general notions concerning them appear in the following passage. "There are some," he says, referring to some among the Jews, "who, receiving as true the unworthy and false representations of God in the Jewish Scriptures, understand not his essential divinity and might ; but regarding him as ignorant, and rejoicing in slaughter, and remitting sins for the gift of sacrifices, and, still more, as deceiving, and speaking falsely, and committing every sort of injustice, maintain while they are committing sin that they are leading relig-

* Homil. II. §§ 38 - 52. Homil. III. § 5.

† Homil. II. § 40, seqq. Homil. III. § 42, seqq.

ious lives, their actions being conformed to those of God." *

BUT in his view of the general character of the Old Testament, the author of the Homilies stood apart from the other Christian writers of the second and third centuries. They received its books from the Jews, and received them with the Jewish notions of their divine authority, and were therefore obliged to resort to modes different from those of the Gnostics, or the author of the Clementine Homilies, for solving the difficulties which they equally felt.

IN the solution that I shall first mention, as resorted to by the catholic Christians, will be perceived that remarkable resemblance, without coincidence, which often appears between their doctrines and those of the Gnostics. In comparing them together, we see sometimes, as in the present case, a striking likeness fashioned out of materials essentially different, while in other cases the material is the same, but moulded into a different form. In the solution of which I now speak, the Logos of the catholic Christians takes the place of the Creator of the

* Homil. XVIII. § 19.

Gnostics as the god of the Jews ; those representations of the Divinity in the Old Testament, which catholic Christians, equally with the Gnostics, regarded as incompatible with the character of the Supreme Being, being referred by them to the Logos.

In his Dialogue with Trypho, Justin Martyr says : — “ I will endeavour to prove to you from the Scriptures, that he who is said to have appeared to Abraham, to Jacob, and to Moses, and is called God, is another god [that is, divine being], different from the God who created all things ; another, I say, numerically, not in will ; for I affirm that he never did any thing at any time but what it was the will of Him who created the world, and above whom there is no other God, that he should do and say.” *

Justin, among many other similar proofs that there is another god beside the Supreme God, quotes those passages in which it is said that God ascended from Abraham ; that God spoke to Moses ; that the Lord came down to see the tower of Babel which the sons of men had built ; and that God shut the door of the ark after Noah had entered. “ Do not suppose,” he says, “ that the unoriginated God either descended or

* Dial. cum Tryph. p. 259.

ascended ; for the ineffable Father and Lord of All neither comes anywhere, nor walks, nor sleeps, nor arises ; but remains in his own place, wherever that may be." After describing the greatness, omniscience, and omnipresence of the Supreme God, he proceeds, — " How, then, can he speak to any one, or be seen by any one, or appear in a little portion of the earth, when the people could not behold on Sinai even the glory of him whom he sent. Neither Abraham, therefore, nor Isaac, nor Jacob, nor any other man, ever saw the Father, the ineffable Lord of All, even of Christ himself ; but they saw him who, through the will of the Father, was a god, His Son, and likewise His angel, as ministering to His purposes." *

Tertullian regarded the Son, or the Logos, as having been the minister of God in creation and in all his subsequent works. To him he ascribes whatever actions are ascribed to God in the Old Testament. "He always descended to converse with men, from the time of Adam to that of the patriarchs and prophets. He who was to assume a human body and soul was even then acquainted with human affections ; asking Adam, as if ignorant, Where art thou, Adam ? repent-

* Dial. cum Tryph. pp. 410, 411.

ing of having made man, as if wanting pre-science ; putting Abraham to trial, as if ignorant of what was in man ; offended and reconciled with the same individuals ; — and so it is with regard to all which the heretics [the Gnostics] seize upon to object to the Creator, as unworthy of God, they being ignorant that those things were suitable to the Son, who was about to submit to human affections, to thirst, hunger, and tears, and even to be born and to die. How can it be that God, the Omnipotent, the Invisible, whom *no man hath seen or can see*, who *dwells in light inaccessible*, walked in the evening in paradise, seeking Adam, and shut the door of the ark after Noah had entered, and cooled himself under an oak with Abraham, and called to Moses from a burning bush ? These things would not be credible concerning the Son of God, if they were not written ; perhaps they would not be credible concerning the Father, if they were.” *

In his work against Marcion, Tertullian, after explaining various particular passages of the Old Testament objected to by him, says that he will give a summary answer to the rest. “ I will give,” are his words, “ a simple and certain ac-

* *Advers. Praxeam*, c. 16. pp. 509, 510.

count of whatever else you have objected to the Creator, as mean, and weak, and unworthy. It is, that God could not have had intercourse with men, unless he had assumed the feelings and affections of humanity, by which he humbled and tempered to human infirmity the intolerable might of his majesty. Unworthy indeed it was in respect to himself, but necessary for man; and therefore became worthy of God, since nothing can be so worthy of God as the salvation of man." Marcion himself believed that God had manifested himself as Christ, and Tertullian proceeds, in language so foreign from what we are accustomed to, that it hardly admits of a literal translation:—"Why do you think that those humiliations [the facts in the Old Testament which Marcion so regarded] are unworthy of our God, seeing that they are more tolerable than the contumelies of the Jews, and the cross, and the tomb? Are not those humiliations ground for concluding * that Christ, subjected as he was to the accidents of man, came from the same God whose assumption of humanity is made by you a matter of reproach?"

* "An hæ sunt pusillitates quæ jam præjudicare debebunt," &c. For "An," we may read "An non," as the sense (about which there is no uncertainty) seems to require.

For we further maintain, that Christ has always been the agent of the Father in his name, that it was he who from the beginning was conversant with men, who had intercourse with the patriarchs and prophets; being the son of the Creator, his Logos, whom he made his Son by producing him from himself, and then set him over all that he disposed and willed; 'making him a little lower than the angels,' as was written by David. In thus being made lower than the angels he was prepared by the Father for those assumptions of humanity with which you find fault. He learnt from the beginning, being then already a man, what he was to be at last. It was he who descended, he who questioned, he who demanded, he who swore. But that the Father has been seen by none, the Gospel common to us both* bears witness; for in this Christ says, — 'No one has known the Father but the Son.' For he had pronounced in the Old Testament likewise, 'No one shall see God and live'; thus determining that the Father is invisible, in whose name and by whose authority he who became visible as the Son of God was God. Thus whatever you require as worthy of God will be found in the invisible Fa-

* That is, the Gospel of Luke as used by Marcion.

of that class of Gnostics, but especially of the principles of their leaders, we may judge in some degree from a passage of the Valentinian, Heracleon, preserved by Clement of Alexandria,* a part of which has been already quoted.† It, at once, serves to explain, and to give credibility to, what is said concerning them by their catholic opponents. In commenting on the words of Jesus, in which he speaks of that profession of him which his disciples were required to make before men, and especially before those in authority, Heracleon says, that there is a profession which is made by faith and conduct, and another by words; that the latter, which is made before those in authority, is erroneously considered by most as the only profession; but that it may be made by hypocrites, and that it has not been made by all those who have been saved, and, among them, not by several of the Apostles. It is only partial, not complete; complete profession is made by works and deeds, corresponding to faith in Christ. He who makes this profession will make the other, should it become a duty, and reason require it. He will rightly profess Christ in words who has previously professed him in his dispositions. Heracleon adds

* Stromat. IV. § 9. pp. 595, 596.

† See before, p. 129.

more to the same effect, but nothing which alters the complexion of the passage. In his comments upon it, Clement says, that here and elsewhere Heraclion, whom he calls the most approved of the Valentinians, appears to agree in opinion with catholic Christians. He conceives, however, that he has disregarded the fact, that a martyr's profession is alone sufficient proof of sincere faith; and observes on the unreasonableness of supposing that it might be made by a hypocrite. "To profess our faith," he goes on to say, "is the duty of all, for this is in our power; to defend it is not the duty of all, for it may not be in our power"; * words that may remind one of Latimer, when, broken by age and suffering, he declared to his judges, that he could not argue for his religion, but that he could die for it.

However unobjectionable, in themselves considered, were the leading sentiments of Heraclion, they were, when thus nakedly stated, not altogether apposite to the times. It is not too much to say, that he discovers some tendency to depreciate that bold profession of Christ, by which, when made before a persecuting judge,

* Τὸ δημολογεῖν ἐκ παντὸς δεῖ· ἐφ' ἡμῖν γάρ· ἀπολογεῖσθαι δὲ οὐκ ἐκ παντός· οὐ γὰρ καὶ τοῦτο ἐφ' ἡμῖν. p. 506.

a Christian sealed his condemnation to torture and death. It is easy to perceive how his view of the subject might degenerate into that which Tertullian, in his "Scorpiace," says was presented by the Valentinians.

There is, indeed, a very striking contrast between the passage of Heracleon, and two treatises which remain to us, one by Tertullian, and the other by Origen. That of Tertullian is entitled "Concerning Flight in Persecution." It is a strong exhortation not to avoid persecution, either by flight, or by buying off those who threatened to become informers. It is written with the intense earnestness of one who, if he had not been a Christian, might have raised a warrior's voice, of power

"To cheer in the mid battle, ay, to turn the flying."

There can be little doubt, that often, under the circumstances of those times, the course of conduct to which he exhorted was that most honorable to Christians, most likely to command the respect of their enemies, and best adapted to extend the knowledge and influence of our religion. In more than one instance, persecution appears to have been checked by the number and intrepidity of those who were ready to submit to martyrdom. There may be errors of

reasoning in his work, but the deepest sincerity is evident throughout ; and, compared with his other writings, it has a subdued tone of expression suited to the subject. It is characterized, at the same time, by an unshrinking consistency, in which its severe purpose is never for a moment lost sight of, and by a sustained energy of wholly unworldly feeling. Tertullian concludes it with the following words : —

“ This doctrine, brother, perhaps seems to you hard and intolerable. But recollect what God said, — *Let him who can receive it receive it ;* that is, Let him who cannot receive it depart. He who fears to suffer does not belong to him who suffered. But he who does not fear to suffer is perfect in love, the love of God ; *for perfect love casts out fear.* Thus it is, that *many are called, but few are chosen.* He is not sought for, who is ready to follow the broad way, but he who will take the narrow path. And thus the Paraclete is necessary, the leader into all truth, the encourager to endure all things ; whom they who have received neither fly persecution, nor buy it off ; we having him on our side, both to speak for us when interrogated, and to aid us when suffering.”

Tertullian, when he wrote this tract, had become a Montanist ; and the Holy Spirit, which

the Montanists believed to have spoken by Montanus, they commonly denominated the Paraclete.

There is as great a difference between the treatise of Origen and that of Tertullian, as may well exist between two works of able writers, relating to the same subject, and having nearly the same purpose. That of Origen is of particular interest. It was addressed, during a time of persecution, to two friends, with one of whom he appears to have been particularly connected, to exhort them to meet suffering and death with Christian fortitude. When we can bring before our minds all that is implied in one friend's writing to another to encourage him to martyrdom, we may, in one respect, have a distinct conception of the state and character of the early catholic Christians. The address of Origen is affectionate, considerate, and respectful, but with no expression of temporary excitement. On the contrary, it has something of his usual languor and diffuseness of style, and oversubtilty of thought. It is characterized by the calmness of one who was thoroughly penetrated by the spirit of our religion, whose earthly passions had been subdued, whose hopes were fixed on heaven ; and who had thus learned to look on life and death indifferently, and to contemplate suffering as one prepared for it.

"I would," says Origen, "that you may be able through the whole of this present conflict to bear in mind the great reward which is laid up in heaven for those who are persecuted and reviled for righteousness' sake, and for the sake of the Son of Man ; so as to rejoice, and exult, and leap for joy, as the Apostles in former days rejoiced, when they were deemed worthy to suffer contumely for him. Would, indeed, that your souls may not be at all perturbed, but that, when standing before the tribunal, and when the naked sword hangs over your throats, you may be strengthened by the peace of God which passes all understanding, and made calm by the thought, that they who are absent from the body are present with the Lord of All. But if we are not able always to preserve our firmness, I would at least that our trouble may not appear, and show itself to those who are alien from our faith." *

"Whether our profession of Christ be complete or not, we may thus determine. If, through the whole time of the inquisition and temptation, we yield no place in our hearts to the Devil, who would corrupt us with evil thoughts of denying our faith, or cause us to

* *Exhortatio ad Martyrium*, § 4. Origen. Opp. I. 276.

hesitate, or pervert us by some sophistry to what is at enmity with a martyr's testimony and our perfection ; if, with this, we bring no stain upon ourselves by any word foreign from our profession ; if we endure all the reproach, and mockery, and laughter, and reviling of our adversaries, and the pity which they seem to have for us, regarding us as in error and foolish, and speaking to us as deluded ; and, still more, if the strong love of children, or their mother, or any of those dearest to us in this world, do not violently draw us back to their enjoyment or to this life ; but, turning from them all, we can devote ourselves wholly to God, and to that life which is with him, as about to be associated with his Only Son and with his followers ; — then we may say, that we have fully perfected our profession.” *

The tone of mind expressed by Tertullian and Origen is very different from that of Heracleon. It is to men possessed with their spirit, that we are indebted, through the providence of God, for the preservation of Christianity. Wholly relieved, as we are, from the necessity of practising those high and hard duties which were appointed to them, we may be unable,

* Ibid. § 11. p. 281.

without an effort, to enter into their principles and feelings. Looking, under very different circumstances, to the severe sufferings to which they were summoned, and not having been strengthened to meet them by that preparatory discipline which they had gone through, we may even shrink from sympathy, and feel rather with those who fled, or bought off their accusers, in times of persecution. But let us at least be just, and give honor where honor is due ; and not suffer our attention to be engrossed by the extravagance that sometimes marked the strength of those virtues which the early Christians displayed, and almost necessarily accompanied them in such minds as Tertullian's.*

I HAVE spoken of the Gnostics as they existed in the second century, and of the charges brought against them by the *early* fathers, the fathers of the second and third centuries. After

* Gibbon (ch. xvi. note 100) says, that the treatise of Tertullian is "filled with the wildest fanaticism, and the most incoherent declamation." That a work such as I have described should appear to a writer like Gibbon expressive of the wildest fanaticism may easily be supposed. But the assertion that it is full of incoherent declamation is utterly unfounded. No writer ever kept his purpose more steadily in view, than does Tertullian in this treatise.

Very probably, Gibbon had never read it, but he had perhaps
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this time, there is, as I have before remarked, little reason to believe that any proper Gnostic sects survived in much vigor. Their doctrines were such as strike with the glare of novelty, and are thrown aside when that becomes tarnished. They were superseded by the kindred sect of the Manichæans. Through the union of Christianity with the imperial power, a flood of corruption poured in among Christians; and a variety of new, bitter, worldly controversies arose, in the fourth century, which diverted men's attention from the old errors of the Gnostics, except as a matter of history, and a means of blackening the name of heretic by odious representations of those who had borne it. There is no reason to doubt that the Gnostics who still remained shared in the degeneracy of that evil age, when darkness was beginning to close over men, and they were about to enter on that long series of centuries that marks the his-

seen what is said by Jortin: — "In the persecution under Severus, many fled to avoid it, or gave money to redeem themselves. Tertullian, like a frantic Montanist, condemned these expedients." (*Remarks on Ecclesiastical History*. (Lond. 1805.) Vol. II. p. 90.) — Jortin was a scholar of some elegance and some acuteness, but of little compass of mind, and wanting almost every requisite essential in treating of the history of the early Christians. In aiming at smartness of style he sometimes falls into flippancy.

tory of the world with its mental and moral desolation. But the specific charges urged against the Gnostics by the orthodox historians of heresy in the fourth and fifth centuries, with Epiphanius at their head, are so obviously in great part calumnies, as to afford no safe ground for determining what was, or what had been, the character of those against whom they are brought. I have, in a note at the end of this volume, stated some facts which show with what incredulity we may be justified in regarding them.*

It appears, then, from what precedes, that there was great diversity of moral character among the Gnostics. Some were distinguished for their severe asceticism, and others for their principled licentiousness. The inveterate prejudices of the Gentiles against the Jews and Judaism, the traditionary errors of the Jews concerning their religion, the form, consequently, in which it was presented to the minds of the new converts, and their inability to comprehend the subject correctly, and to solve, in a satisfactory manner, the difficulties with which it was and is embarrassed, caused a portion of the

* See Additional Note, C.

Gentile converts to separate the Mosaic dispensation from the Christian, and to regard the latter alone as coming from the Supreme Being. These were the Gnostics. But the arbitrary hypothesis of a Supreme God and an inferior god, by which the Gnostics made a forced separation of Judaism from Christianity, and the inconsistency of their scheme with the plain language of Christ and his Apostles, spread confusion and indistinctness through all their conceptions of our religion. Notwithstanding this, the Marcionites, influenced more by moral and Christian feeling than by any other cause, in rejecting the representations of the Old Testament as applicable to the true God, did not fall behind the catholic Christians in the strictness or strength of their self-denying virtues. On the contrary, there seems to have been much of fanaticism mixed with their renunciation of the pleasures of this life. But the theosophic Gnostics were less detached from the heathen world. They drew their vague speculations from its philosophy. There was a tendency in their minds to substitute for the realities of God's revelation a baseless, abstract faith, the evidence of which was the testimony of their own spiritual nature. They seem to have regarded Christianity too much as a system

of philosophy, and too little as a divine revelation. They thus stood as a sort of intermediate class between the catholic Christians and the Heathens. Many of them, doubtless, received our religion in good faith, according to their modification of it, and conformed their lives to the moral purity which it requires ; but it does not appear that any considerable number felt it to be a means of the moral renovation of mankind, or regarded themselves as called upon to seal their testimony to it with their blood. It is clear that they had not that zeal in avowing and defending and propagating their faith, as of inestimable value to their fellow-men, which exposed the catholic Christians to persecution. Some of them, pretending, perhaps, as men of enlightened minds, to hold in disregard outward forms of religion, joined, of their own accord, in idol-sacrifices ; while others, like the ancient heathen philosophers, were probably ready to escape odium and vexation by whatever compliances were necessary with the popular superstitions. It appears, further, that there were some, perhaps many, of their number, who, though not countenanced by their principal leaders, or the more respectable portion of the theosophic Gnostics, seized on the doctrine of the incorruptible purity of their spiritual nature, as

a pretence for indulging in gross vices. The existence of such a class of men, not altogether destitute of belief in the divine mission of our Saviour, is, as we have seen, accounted for by causes that had been in operation from the time when St. Paul first gathered converts from the Gentiles. They were early thrown off from the body of catholic Christians, and became apostates or heretics. It may readily be believed that they had no attachment to Judaism which would prevent them from becoming Gnostics, and, in the pride of their new spiritual superiority, looking down upon the unenlightened and over-scrupulous body of Christians by whom they were rejected. In taking this course they met with no obstacle ; for among the generality of theosophic Gnostics there was no combination or discipline, which might have repelled or excluded the unworthy from being associated with them.

Nor was there any thing precisely to define the limits between the theosophic Gnostics and individuals holding Gnostic opinions, and more or less affected by the widely spreading influence of Christianity, who yet had no title to the name of Christians. But, though the limits were undefined, there was the well-marked general distinction between those who decided-

ly belonged to one class or the other, that the former believed, and the latter did not believe, the divine mission of Christ. In respect, also, to one noted pseudo-Christian sect which has been mistaken for a branch of the Gnostics, I mean the Carpocratians, it will appear, I think, from what is about to be said, that its members did not even hold Gnostic doctrines. We must, therefore, separate, as far as possible, the pseudo-Christians from the Gnostics ; and to this subject we will next attend.

CHAPTER V.

ON SOME PSEUDO-CHRISTIAN SECTS AND INDIVIDUALS WHO
HAVE BEEN IMPROPERLY CONFOUNDED WITH THE GNOS-
TICS.

WE have seen that Simon Magus is represented by the fathers as the parent of all the heretical sects, while, at the same time, he is described, not as a disciple of Christ, but as opposing himself to Christ as a rival. His followers, the Simonians, therefore, were not Christians. These facts may induce us readily to give credit to the supposition, that among those who may seem to be, or who are, enumerated as Christian heretics, by some one or more of the fathers, there were other sects or individuals who had no title to the name of Christian; though many of them may have held the Gnostic doctrine, that the material universe is the work of a being or beings imperfect or evil. This confusion, if it exist, of Christian and pseudo-Christian sects must be removed, before we can form a correct notion of the Gnostics; and the investigation of the subject may also

serve to make us acquainted with the character of the times, and the effects produced by the promulgation of Christianity.

AMONG the sects referred to, the *Carpocratians* may be first mentioned. They had their origin in Alexandria, and became conspicuous about the middle of the second century. By Irenæus they are classed with the Gnostics; and, according to him, they affirmed that the world was made by angels. But a comparison of his whole account* with the information afforded by Clement of Alexandria† may lead us to the conclusion, that the Carpocratians were neither Christians nor heathen Gnostics, but a corrupt sect of Platonists, who pretended to regard Christ as a very eminent philosopher among the Barbarians, as Confucius was at one time celebrated by European* men of letters. This may appear from what follows.

With Carpocrates was connected, as a founder of the sect, his son Epiphanes, the author of a work "Concerning Justice," from which Clement quotes a series of passages.‡

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. I. c. 25. pp. 103 - 105. c. 28. § 2. p. 107. Lib. II. cc. 31 - 33. pp. 164 - 168.

† Stromat. III. § 2. pp. 511 - 515.

‡ Stromat. III. ubi supra.

The purpose of them is to maintain that no property should exist, but that all things should be common to all. "The justice of God," Epiphanes says, "is a certain equal distribution."* Following out his principles, he maintains, as Plato had taught in his Republic, that there should be a community of women;—women in Egypt and Greece, as in the East, being regarded much in the light of property. For his doctrine of equality he argues from the natural order of things; according to which, for example, God gives the light of the sun equally to all; and a common nature, and food in common, to all the individuals of the different species of animals. This order he vindicates as good, he regards it as a manifestation of the great moral law of all beings, and ascribes it to the "Maker and Father of All," that is, to the Supreme God. *

It appears, therefore, that Epiphanes regarded the order of nature as good, and as proceeding from the Supreme Being. He differed, therefore, from the Gnostics in their fundamental doctrine. They considered the order of nature as full of defects and evils, and ascribed it, in consequence, to an imperfect Crea-

* Τὴν δικαιοσύνην τοῦ Θεοῦ κοινωνίαν τινὰ εἶναι μετ' ἰσότητος.
p. 512.

tor. But Epiphanes, it is clear, had no such being in view. He ascribes the constitution of things in the material universe to the Supreme God, whom alone he regards as the Creator. He was, moreover, so far from holding the doctrine of the Gnostics, which identified the Creator with the God of the Jews, that, as quoted by Clement, he considered the command, "Thou shalt not covet," as ridiculous, and more especially the command, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife"; — they being, according to him, directly opposite to the ordinances of the Creator as manifested in his works. Epiphanes, then, was not a Gnostic, nor was his father Carpocrates, from whom he derived his principles, nor the followers of both, by whom they were adopted. Nor had they, I conceive, more title to be considered as Christians.

It is the obvious remark of Clement, that the doctrines alleged clearly subvert the Law and the Gospel. Upon their first aspect, they show themselves to be the doctrines of one who had no deference for the divine authority of Christ. Their advocate, Epiphanes, was, according to Clement, a youth of extraordinary precocity, who died at the age of seventeen, after having been educated by his father in the different branches of knowledge, particularly in

the Platonic philosophy. Clement says that his mother was a native of Cephallenia, and that in Same, a city of that island, a temple was erected to him as a god, and divine honors were paid him after his death. There seems no reasonable ground for doubting this account. There is nothing in it inconsistent with the customs of the Heathens. Clement lived in the same century with Epiphanes, and in the same city in which he was born; and the facts stated by him are of such a kind as hardly to admit the supposition of any essential mistake concerning them. But the followers of Epiphanes, who paid him divine honors, were evidently Heathens. In conformity with this, Irenæus tells us, that the Carpocratians had images of Christ, together with those of heathen philosophers, as Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle, which they crowned with garlands, and honored after the fashion of the Gentiles.* It appears, therefore, that they placed Christ in the same rank with those philosophers. Some of them, he says, affirmed that they were like Jesus, and some, that in certain respects they were stronger or better.†

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. I. c. 25. § 6. p. 105.

† Ibid. Lib. I. c. 25. § 2. p. 103. Lib. II. c. 32. § 3. p. 165.

Respecting their other opinions, Irenæus states, that they believed that "Jesus was the son of Joseph, and was like other men, except that his soul, being strong and pure, remembered what it had seen in its circumgyration with the unoriginated God." * These conceptions were founded on the doctrine of Plato, who had taught, in his Phædrus, the preëxistent immortality of all souls, and that those of the better class had, before their immersion in matter, ascended to the outer orb of heaven, where they had been borne round in company with the gods, and had beheld the eternal Ideas, there presented to view, of which all true knowledge is only a reminiscence.†

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. I. c. 25. § 1. p. 103.

† Plato in Phædro, p. 245, seqq. (I refer here, as elsewhere, to the pages of Henry Stephen's edition (Paris, 1578), which are commonly numbered in the margin of later editions.) Plato puts the representations there given into the mouth of Socrates. They appear irreconcilable with those concerning the creation, and the preëxistent state, of souls, given in his Timæus, p. 41, seqq. But his imaginations at different times were not unfrequently at variance with each other. — The words of Plato, in his Phædrus, in speaking of the vision of eternal Ideas presented to preëxistent souls, as borne round on the outer orb of heaven, are so characteristic of ancient philosophy as to be worth quoting. "This supercelestial place," he says, "no poet here on earth has ever celebrated or will celebrate worthily. *But thus it is; for one must dare to describe it truly, especially one who is discoursing of the truth.*" p. 247.

Irenæus, attributing Gnostic conceptions to the Carpocratians, goes on to say, that, according to them, the soul of Jesus being thus excellent, "power was sent it by God to enable it to escape the Makers of the World, and passing through them all, and being wholly liberated, to ascend to him"; and that the same would be the case with all souls who followed his course. This conception of Makers of the World, disposed to impede the ascent of the soul, is Gnostic; but that Irenæus was in error in ascribing it to the Carpocratians may appear by what has been quoted from Epiphanes. It seems to have been not uncommon to attribute incorrectly to one sect opinions held, or reputed to be held, by another. The mistake of Irenæus may have arisen in this way alone; or it may be otherwise accounted for. Through the irregular action of Christianity upon their minds, and the consequent unsettling of their old faith, the Carpocratians may have advanced so far toward the opinions of the catholic Christians, as to regard the inferior gods of the later Platonists, the heathen divinities, as evil spirits; and if this were so, Irenæus might easily confound those inferior gods with the creator-angels of the Gnostics. That such was the case may be conjectured from what he states to have been said by them,

namely, that the soul of Jesus had learned to despise the Makers of the World, in consequence of having been educated among the Jews.* No Gnostic would have represented Jesus as learning to despise the Makers of the World, among whom they commonly regarded the god of the Jews as the chief, in consequence of his being imbued with Jewish notions; but the Carpocratians, if such as we have supposed them, might well have assigned this as a cause for his contempt of the heathen divinities. It can hardly be, that the account of Irenæus is not erroneous.

The morals of the Carpocratians are portrayed in very dark colors by their contemporaries, Irenæus and Clement. They represent the sect as having brought reproach on the Christian name;—upon “us,” says Irenæus, “who have no communion with them either in doctrine, or in morals, or in daily life.”† The Heathens, doubtless, were very ready to impute to Christians the vices and licentiousness of those whose minds had merely been put in action by the new faith, of those bands of out-

* *Jesu autem dicunt animam in Judæorum consuetudine nutritam contempsisse eos [fabricatores mundi].* Lib. I. c. 25. § 1. p. 103.

† Lib. I. c. 25. § 3. p. 103.

laws, who, not belonging to the number of the true followers of our religion, yet accompanied its march, and hovered round its outposts. Some modern writers have been disposed to regard the charges brought against the Carpocratians by their contemporaries as improbable, and in great part unfounded. But their principal argument is, that the Carpocratians were Christians, and that Christians could not have been guilty of such immoralities. If, on the contrary, we regard them as Heathens, on whom the indirect and irregular influence of Christianity had had no other effect than to set them free from the restraints of common opinion, and who, in consequence, were inflated with a notion of their superiority to common prejudices, we shall perceive that they were in the very state in which moral disorders might be expected to break out among them. The charges against them are to a great extent confirmed by the principles of Epiphanes, whom they deified. These are advanced in the broadest manner in the extracts from him given by Clement. He maintained that all laws for the security of private property were in violation of the universal law of God, which had given all things in common to all; and that they alone created the offences which they pun-

ished.* This, indeed, may be considered as little more than a speculative principle, since society imposes such severe penalties on those who act in conformity to it, that none are likely to reduce it to practice from a mere conviction of its truth. But his doctrine respecting the promiscuous intercourse of the sexes, which not only broke down all moral restraint, but represented it as an ordinance of God, is sufficient, especially when we consider the state of society in which it was promulgated, to remove any doubt concerning the truth of the licentiousness of which the Carpocratians were accused. They were heathen philosophers, and Christian chastity was not to be learned from heathen philosophy. They were, as we have supposed, of the school of Plato, and in two of his most noted Dialogues they might have found a mixture of philosophical jargon with nameless impurity.† Nor is there any reason

* Οἱ νόμοι — παρανομεῖν ἐδίδασαν. Ἡ γὰρ ἰδιότης τῶν νόμων τὴν κοινωνίαν τοῦ θεοῦ νόμου κατέτεμεν καὶ παρατρώγει. — Τό τ' ἐμὸν καὶ τὸ σὸν, φησὶ, διὰ τῶν νόμων παρεισελθεῖν. — Ἡ δὲ κοινωνία παρανομηθεῖσα, καὶ τὰ τῆς ἰσότητος, ἐγέννησε θρεμμάτων καὶ καρπῶν κλέπτην. pp. 512, 513.

† I refer to the *Phædrus* and the *Banquet*, “*amatoria colloquia καὶ παιδευαστικά.*”

to question what Irenæus says of them,* that they, like the later Platonists, professed the science and practice of magic or theurgy, and used their pretended skill for the purpose of deception.

I HAVE reserved for a separate head the mention of one doctrine which Irenæus imputes to them ; because, so far as it may appear to have been held by any individuals, it connects them in a class with other *pseudo-Christians, maintaining that the practice of scandalous immoralities was a religious duty*. As followers of Plato, the Carpocratians believed the doctrine of the preëxistence and transmigration of souls ; and maintained, says Irenæus, that the soul would not obtain its final liberation from matter till it had been conversant with every kind of life and every mode of action ; that is, as he explains their meaning, till it had been conversant with every kind of impurity and vice.† A strong doubt may at once arise whether such a doctrine could have been professed by any individuals ; and the idea of acting upon it, to

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. I. c. 25. § 3. p. 103. Lib. II. c. 31. § 2. p. 164. c. 32. § 3. p. 165.

† Lib. I. c. 25. § 4. pp. 103, 104. Lib. II. c. 32. § 2. p. 165.

its full extent, appears altogether monstrous and incredible. Irenæus himself says, that he could not believe that their practice corresponded to their principles. What, indeed, were the principles or the practice of certain libertine individuals of the second century, called Carpocratians, whether they were more immoral than some have supposed, or less immoral than their opponents represented, is a subject that may seem wholly uninteresting at the present day. Certainly it is so, as far as justice to their memory is concerned. But, on the other hand, if they held the doctrine imputed to them by Irenæus, or if they held any doctrine which, without being greatly misrepresented, might afford occasion for the statement which he makes, this is a phenomenon in human nature that may well deserve attention.

That they did hold some doctrine of this kind, and that he did not essentially mistake their meaning, may appear from various considerations. Irenæus affirms, that it was expressed in their writings; and that they taught that Jesus had communicated it privately to his Apostles and disciples, and had appointed them to communicate it to those who were worthy and obedient. They would not have maintained that a doctrine concerning morals had been

taught privately, if it had been such as was correspondent to the tenor of the Gospels. He says, that they accommodated to their doctrine the words of our Saviour, "Agree with thine adversary quickly"; representing the adversary as Satan, one of the angels of the world, who would not suffer the soul to obtain its freedom from imprisonment in some mortal body, *till it had paid the uttermost farthing*; that is, according to his explanation, till it had been conversant in all the works of this world. His appeal to their writings, and the particulars which he gives relating to their doctrine, serve to show, that, if his account is not true to the letter, it still had an essential foundation in truth. It is repeated by other writers, particularly by Tertullian, who says,* that they represented "crimes as the tribute which life must pay"; *facinora tributa sunt vitæ*; and notes the same perversion of Scripture that is mentioned by Irenæus.

The doctrine in question, stated in its least offensive form, we may, perhaps, conceive to have been, that the soul must have full experience of this life before passing into another state, and that to this end it must be conver-

* De Animâ, c. 35. p. 291.

sant with pleasures commonly considered criminal. To represent indulgence in such pleasures as a matter of religious obligation was conformable to the teaching of Epiphanes, that promiscuous intercourse of the sexes was an ordinance of God. Irenæus concludes his account of the moral principles of the Carpocratians with saying, that they taught that men were "saved by faith and love, but that other things were indifferent; that, according to the opinions of men, some were accounted good and others bad, but that nothing was bad by nature." * By faith they may have meant a firm adherence to their philosophy; for to souls purified by philosophy Plato assigned the highest places after death. But in what they said of faith and love we may recognize, perhaps, a common tendency of those most licentious in their speculations or their practice to shelter themselves under a show of words expressive of common sentiments or belief.

It may appear, then, that the Carpocratians belonged to the same class with those pseudo-Christians mentioned by Clement of Alexandria, as quoted in the last chapter.† The principle common to them all was, that the practice

* Lib. I. c. 25. § 5. p. 104.

† See pp. 130 - 133.

of scandalous immoralities was a matter of religious obligation. It may be observed, in connection, that the charges brought against them, however general may be the terms in which they are sometimes expressed, evidently relate principally to the vices of sensuality and profligacy.

The avowal of such a principle may strike us at first view as a moral absurdity scarcely credible. But it was in truth a principle with which Paganism had made men familiar, and which it had thoroughly sanctioned. In the heathen worship, gross indecencies, and abominable extravagances and debaucheries, were represented as acceptable to many of their gods, to Bacchus, Venus, Cybele, and Flora; not to mention other inferior divinities of a still baser character. The public celebration of many of the heathen rites was marked with deep stains of pollution. In Egypt, where brute animals were deified, heathen writers tell us (whether we can believe them or not), that abominations were committed in their worship, with which even those that Epiphanius charges on the heretics whom he most vilifies are not to be compared.*

* Gibbon (Ch. XV. Vol. II. pp. 289 - 294) speaks, in contrast

That such vices as the pseudo-Christians practised might make a part of religion was, therefore, the doctrine of the age. But perhaps the most remarkable analogy with their principles and practice is to be found in those of a sect that has long existed in India; the facts relating to which are so extraordinary as well to deserve notice. Striking analogies also exist, as we shall hereafter see, between the relig-

with the pious horrors and foolish scruples of the early Christians, of "the cheerful devotion," "the agreeable fictions," and "the beautiful mythology" of Paganism; and says, that, "on the days of solemn festivals," "superstition always wore the appearance of pleasure, and often of virtue." He could hardly have used language more unworthy of a philosopher, or less consonant to truth. The pagan mythology, the history of the pagan gods, when viewed in its naked deformity, appears a history of the coarse indulgence of animal propensities, and of acts of fraud, cruelty, and meanness. It everywhere outrages decency and humanity. The better part of the heathen philosophers, with Plato at their head, held it in very different esteem from what Gibbon expresses. The language respecting its fictions which Cicero puts into the mouth of the Stoic, Balbus (*De Naturâ Deorum*, Lib. II. § 28), is among the shortest and mildest of their censures. "*Hæc et dicuntur et creduntur stultissime, et plena sunt futilitatis, summæque levitatis.*" It may be worth while to quote what even Gibbon himself elsewhere says (*Ch. III. Vol. I. 112*): — "We should disgrace the virtues of the Antonines by comparing them with the vices of Hercules or Jupiter. Even the characters of Cæsar or Augustus were far superior to those of the popular deities." The pagan rites were, in great part, conformed to the supposed characters of the divinities worshipped, and often bore direct allusion to the fables concerning them.

ious doctrines of the Hindoos and those of the theosophic Gnostics ; and it is not, therefore, strange, that small sects should have shown themselves among the pseudo-Christians and the heathen Gnostics similar to the one referred to in Hindostan, the members of which are called Vámis or Vámácharis. They are worshippers in particular of the Sakti, or female energy, of Siva, hypostatized as the goddess Devi. "The object of their worship is to obtain supernatural powers in this life, and to be identified after death with Siva and Sakti." In their principal ceremonies the Sakti is personified by a naked female ; and conformably to the ritual prescribed in their sacred books, and to a very general belief, those ceremonies are "terminated by the most scandalous orgies among the votaries." These are religious observances ; "for such practices, if merely for sensual gratification, are held by the sect to be as illicit and reprehensible as they are regarded by any other branch of the Hindoo faith." Such is the account of Professor Wilson.* By another writer it is said, that the Vámácharis "carry the gratification of the

* In the second part of his "Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindoos," published in the "Asiatic Researches," Vol. XVII. (Calcutta, 1832) p. 221, seqq.

senses to an unlimited extent, under the hope, [or] rather under the pretence, of extinguishing them by satiety."* Some further information concerning them may be found in the note below.

The doctrines, precepts, and ritual of the

* See "The Friend of India" (quarterly series), a periodical publication by the missionaries at Serampore. Vol. I. (1821) p. 263, note. In the third volume of the same work, p. 628, seqq., there is an account of the Vāmācharia, there called *Veeras*, similar to that given by Professor Wilson. This account of their doctrines and rites is taken from a work under review, published as a religious guide by an opulent native in 1823, being a "Compilation of the Precepts and Doctrines of the Tantras." The author of the article says: — "In the chapter on the three classes of Tantrikes [the followers of the Tantras], the 'beasts,' who abstain from the licentious practices of the others, are aspersed without mercy. The *veeras*, who drink wine, frequent brothels, and live in a delirium of pleasure, are directed to associate with the initiated only, to partake of intoxicating drugs, to be violent and furious in their conduct, to anoint their bodies with ashes like madmen, never to abstain from liquor, to worship the gods with animal and even human sacrifices, and practise the *Bhiruvee chukru*, a circle in which the followers of the Tantras sit down indiscriminately, without reference to cast, to drink wine and eat flesh." It is said in the Tantras, that "the Vedas, and other writings esteemed sacred by the Hindoos, condemn these actions only when they are performed without previous purifications; when thus purified, they become holy and meritorious."

"The work," continues the author of the article, "advances in licentiousness, as it draws to a close"; and of this he gives sufficient exemplification. But it is not necessary to proceed further in an account of its abominations.

The Vāmācharis are also described in Ward's "Account of the
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Vámácharis are given in the Tantras, books to which they ascribe authority superior to that of the Vedas. The existence of such "sacred books," directing the practice of the most impure rites, and enjoining a life which is but one course of vice, as the means of perfection, and of identification after death with the Divinity, may open a new view of human nature, and serve to render credible what we could not else readily believe. Yet the rites observed in the worship of some of the gods of Greece, Rome, and Egypt were in their nature similar to those imposed by the Tantras.

Writings, Religion, and Manners of the Hindoos." (Serampore, 1811.) Chap. IV. Sect. 6. Vol. III. p. 327, seqq.

The directions for the worship of the Sakti are given by Professor Wilson only in the original Sanscrit; and the other writers mentioned refrain from detailing them, as too abominably indecent. Professor Wilson says: — "It is contrary to all knowledge of the human character to admit the possibility of these transactions in their fullest extent; and, though the worship of the Sakti according to the above outline may be sometimes performed, yet there can be little doubt of its being practised but seldom, and then in solitude and secrecy. In truth, few of the ceremonies, there is reason to believe, are ever observed." The Compiler of the Precepts and Doctrines of the Tantras says, that the commands respecting the worship of the Sakti are not binding in this age of iron. (Friend of India, III. 630.) It is agreed, however, that the sect exists at the present day, with some of the tenets and practices described. Professor Wilson, in speaking of the worship of Kali or Dourga as particularly prevalent in Bengal, says, that the rites observed almost place her worshippers among the Vámácharia.

BUT, though we receive as essentially true the accounts of Irenæus and Clement respecting the pseudo-Christians whom we have been considering, we cannot extend the same credit to the outrageous charges brought by writers of the fourth and fifth centuries, particularly by Epiphanius, against some of those whom they represented as heretics. There is a most offensive specimen of them in the account which that writer gives of a pretended sect, to which, with the confusion frequent in his writings, he applies the name of "*Gnostics*," *used, not as a generic, but a specific name.** The origin of his appropriation of the term to a particular sect may be thus explained.

Irenæus speaks of the Gnostics whom he supposes to have existed antecedently to their being split into different sects and called after different leaders, simply under that generic name, and uses the same general name also concerning those whom he does not refer to any particular class. Especially at the conclusion of his first book, after having given an account of the principal Gnostic sects, distinguished by particular names, as referred to their respective leaders, he says, that beside these a

* Hæres. XXVI. Opp. I. 82.

multitude of Gnostics arose, whose different doctrines he proceeds to mention, without denoting those who held them by any specific appellations.* Among them were those who were afterwards named Ophians and Cainites. Irenæus likewise says, that the Carpocratians called themselves Gnostics;† by which appropriation of the name, they, of course, meant nothing more than that they were “enlightened men.”

The latter remark of Irenæus has led Eusebius to affirm, after speaking of Simon Magus, Menander, Saturninus, and Basilides, that “Irenæus writes that Carpocrates was the father of another sect, called that of the Gnostics.”‡ The passage is remarkable, as showing how confused were the notions of Eusebius concerning the earlier heretics, and may lead to the conclusion, that, in his time, they had almost sunk out of notice. In fact, he appears to have had little or no personal knowledge of them, and to have used Irenæus as his principal authority in speaking of them. Him, it seems, he had consulted

* Lib. I. cc. 29–31. p. 107, seqq. — In the first sentence of chapter twenty-ninth, the word “Barbelo” appears to be an interpolation.

† Lib. I. c. 25. § 6.

‡ Hist. Eccles. Lib. IV. c. 7.

so negligently, that among the various sects of Gnostics he thus appropriates the name to one, the Carpocratians,* as if it belonged to them exclusively.

Perhaps, also, Epiphanius misapprehended Irenæus, mistaking his use of the term "Gnostics" as a generic name, in the passages before mentioned, for its use as a specific appellation; and this mistake may have suggested to him the fabrication of his sect of subordinate Gnostics.† But his real purpose, I conceive, in his account of this pretended sect, was to cast odium upon all those heretics who bore the name of Gnostics. Accordingly, in his account he makes no distinction between this sect and the whole body of Gnostics, of which, if the sect existed, it could at most have been regarded only as a subdivision. His accusations stand against Gnostics generally, without any limitation, there being nothing in this part of his work from which it could be inferred that there were other heretics who bore the name besides those of whom he is speaking.

* In appropriating it to the Carpocratians, he differs from Epiphanius, who distinguishes between the Carpocratians and his Gnostics; and who says (Opp. I. pp. 77, 82), that the latter had their origin from the Nicolaitans.

† Hæres. XXVI. Opp. I. 82, seqq.

In conformity with what may be presumed to have been his purpose, he has loaded this fictitious sect (as I conceive it to be) with charges of absurd doctrines, abominable crimes, and loathsome impurities. "Scruples are felt," says Beausobre, "about giving the lie to Epiphanius, who represents this sect as Christians; but, for myself, I feel much stronger scruples against ranking among Christian heretics individuals who were the most profane of men, if what is said of them be true."* Certainly, such individuals as Epiphanius describes could not have been Christians; but it may further be observed, that his authority is not of a kind to afford ground for believing that such individuals ever existed, supposing their existence possible. Epiphanius is a writer as deficient in plausibility, as in decency and veracity. He has in an extraordinary manner implicated his own character in his account; for, after describing practices which no mind not thoroughly corrupt could regard as other than ineffably odious, he asserts that he had gained his knowledge from women belonging to the sect, who, in his youth, had endeavoured to corrupt his virtue and seduce him to

* *Histoire de Manichée et du Manichéisme*, Tome II. p. 68.

join it ;* that he had been under strong temptation, but that God in his mercy had delivered him, in answer to his prayers and groans ; and that then he had denounced the members of the sect, whose names had before been unknown, to the "bishops in that place" (what bishops, or what place, he does not specify), and that "the city" (a nameless city) had in consequence been purged by the banishment of about eighty individuals.†

WHILE, however, we reject in the gross the account of Epiphanius, as not true of any body of men, it does not follow that it is throughout a mere fabrication. There may have been in his age crazy and vicious fanatics, more or less resembling the Vāmācharis of India, who afforded a certain foundation for it. Some facts are also to be discovered in what Epiphanius has brought together. He mentions and quotes a book of some interest, of which he affords the only account, and concerning which there seems no reason to suspect him of mistake or falsehood. It was called the "Gospel of Eve,"

* According to his own account, he was acquainted with the private sign by which the members of the sect recognized each other. *Hæres.* XXVI. § 4. pp. 85, 86.

† *Hæres.* XXVI. § 17. pp. 99, 100.

as containing the wisdom which Eve had learned from the Serpent.* That it was so called is one among the many proofs which make evident what we shall hereafter have occasion to observe, that the title "Gospel" did not imply that a book to which it was given was a history of the ministry of Jesus. But this book is an object of curiosity for another reason. It appears from the single passage of it extant, quoted by Epiphanius, to have been founded on the Egyptian pantheism. Conformably to this, he says,† that those who used it believed that "the *same* soul is dispersed in animals, and insects, and fishes, and serpents, and men, and in herbs and trees and fruits." The passage from the Gospel of Eve is to the following effect. ‡ The writer, or the person represented as speaking, says, — "I stood on a high mountain, and I saw a man of large stature, and another mutilated; and I heard, as it were, a voice of thunder, and I drew near to hearken, and it spoke to me and said, 'I am thou, and thou art I; and wherever thou mayest be, there am I; and I am dispersed in all things; and from whatever place thou wouldst collect me, in collecting me thou art collecting thyself.'"

* Ibid. § 2. p. 84.

† Ibid. § 9. p. 90.

‡ Ibid. § 3. p. 84.

What the two figures were intended to symbolize cannot, I think, be conjectured with any probability. But the words uttered appear evidently to be an expression of the pantheistic doctrine, according to which all individual beings are but parts of the one, sole, self-subsistent being, the Universe. There is, perhaps, in the passage, an allusion to the fable of the mutilation of the body of Osiris by Typhon, and the collection of his members by Isis, which, when the absurdities of ancient mythology were transformed by the philosophers of later times into allegories, was mystically explained, as symbolizing the discription and disappearance of Ideas, the essential forms of things, the body of Osiris, through the action of the destructive powers of nature, personified as Typhon, and their being collected anew and readapted to their purpose by the receptive and nutritive powers typified by Isis.* The analogy, also, is striking between the words said to be uttered and the inscription which Plutarch reports to have been engraved on the temple of Isis at Saïs : — “ I am all that has been, is, or will be ” ; † Isis being here per-

* Plutarch. *De Iside et Osiride*, § 53. *Moral. Tom. II.* pp. 526, 527. Edit. Wyttienbach.

† *Ibid.* § 9. p. 453. Plutarch concludes the inscription thus : —
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sonified as Universal Nature. It is to be observed, that there is great confusion in the Egyptian mythology, the same attributes being ascribed to different divinities. This confusion

“And my veil no mortal has ever lifted.” Proclus gives it with a different ending. That it was actually to be found on or in the temple at Sais is very doubtful. But as regards our present purpose the question is unimportant; since the report of Plutarch sufficiently shows the existence of this conception of Isis long before Epiphanius’s notice of the Gospel of Eve. See, respecting this inscription, Jablonski’s *Pantheon Ægyptiorum*, P. I. Lib. I. c. 3. § 7. and Mosheim’s notes in his Latin translation of Cudworth’s *Intellectual System*, Tom. I. p. 510, seqq., and p. 522. Edit. secund. In the last note Mosheim gives the correct reading of another remarkable inscription to Isis of similar import, found at Capua, which is to this effect: — “Aerrius Balbinus dedicates thee [that is, a part of the universe, a stone] to thyself, who art one and all things, the goddess Isis.”

It may here be observed, that Cudworth should be read with the notes of Mosheim; unless, indeed, one be so acquainted with the philosophy and religion of the ancients, and so accustomed to reasoning, and to estimating the power and the ambiguity of language, as to be able to correct for himself his deceptive representations. He deserves the highest praise for integrity as a writer; his learning was superabundant, and his intellect vigorous enough to wield it to his purpose. But he transfers his own religious conceptions to the heathen philosophers and religionists, he infuses the sentiments of a modern theist into their words, and he confounds together the doctrines of those who preceded Christianity and of those who were powerfully acted upon by its influence. He thus spreads a luminous cloud over the ancient heathen theology, which Mosheim has done something to dispel. Mosheim has likewise corrected many of the other errors of fact, or mistakes of judgment, which run through the mass of Cudworth’s learning; and has added much to illustrate the topics of which he treats.

probably originated from the fact that one god was the peculiar object of veneration in one place, and another in another, so that the highest attributes were in different places ascribed to different gods ; but it was at once both solved and aggravated by the mystical theology, which taught that they were all only manifestations of Universal Nature, — each of them but different names for the “One and All,” considered under different relations.

From the title of the book mentioned by Epiphanius, that is, from its being called a “gospel,” from the circumstance that he ascribes its use to an heretical sect, and from the account given by him of the pantheistic opinions of this sect, we may infer that there were individuals who blended conceptions borrowed from Christianity with the Egyptian mythology and pantheism, and who have been improperly represented as Christian heretics. Pseudo-Christians of like character appear to have existed in Egypt at an early period. We have some information, such as it is, concerning this subject in a curious letter of Hadrian, preserved by the Pagan historian Vopiscus.* The Emperor says : — “ Egypt, my dear Servian, which

* In his *Life of Saturninus*.

you recommended to me, I have found to be light, vacillating, and borne about by every rumor. Those who worship Serapis are Christians ; and those who call themselves Christian bishops are devoted to Serapis. There is no ruler of a Jewish synagogue, no Samaritan, no Christian priest, who is not an astrologer, a diviner, a leader of a sect.* The Patriarch † himself, when he comes to Egypt, is forced by some to worship Serapis, and by others, Christ." The Emperor may not have had the best opportunities for obtaining information respecting the state of religion among the Egyptians, and he may have trusted too much to the jeers of his courtiers ; but notwithstanding this, and notwithstanding the levity and obvious extravagance

* "A leader of a sect." The Latin word is *alipites*, which means *an anointer*, one who anoints those who have bathed, or the combatants for the arena. But, as it is not easy to perceive any appropriateness in this meaning, I have ventured to render the word in a sense of the Greek *ἀλειπτης*, which is used metaphorically to signify *an inciter* or *leader*. Perhaps the Emperor wrote the word in Greek letters. But after all, in using the expressions which he does, *mathematicus*, *haruspex*, *alipites*, he may have had in mind a line in Juvenal's description of a needy Greek adventurer (Sat. III. 76), — "Grammaticus, rhetor, geometres, pictor, alipites" ; and may thus, in employing the word *alipites*, have intended only an expression of contempt.

† The Patriarch of the Jews must be meant ; as the title and dignity of Patriarch were not known in the Christian church till long after the time of Hadrian.

of his letter, we cannot suppose that what he says was wholly without foundation. Some state of things existed in Egypt, in the first half of the second century, which gave occasion to his representation. The minds of many, it may be presumed, were affected by Christianity, who had but a very imperfect knowledge of what Christianity was, and some of whom combined it very grossly with their former errors.

It seems probable that the book mentioned by Epiphanius, the Gospel of Eve, containing the wisdom which Eve learned from the Serpent, had its origin among certain reputed heretics, who, according to Origen, were not Christians. They were called *Ophians* or *Ophites* (we might render the name *Serpentists*), from the Greek word *ὄφις*, a serpent; because, as Origen says, they took the part of the Serpent who seduced Eve, and represented him as having given good counsel to our first parents.* Irenæus, in one of the last chapters of his first book, † before referred to, ‡ gives an account of the doctrines of a certain sect not named by him, but which, as is evident from a comparison with Origen and

* Origen. cont. Celsum. Lib. VI. § 28. Opp. I. pp. 651, 652.

† Cap. 30.

‡ See p. 212.

other subsequent writers, was that of the Ophians. Nothing entitled to much credit is added by the later historians of the heretics to the notices of Irenæus and Origen.

Origen's mention of them is incidental. There is no reason to distrust its essential correctness, but he enters into no general exposition of their system. The account of Irenæus is confused and improbable, and appears to have been put together from imperfect and inconsistent sources of information. The statements respecting them by him and by the other writers who speak of them as heretics, as the author of the Addition to Tertullian, Epiphanius, and Theodoret, when taken in connection, present a system of absurdities so palpably irreconcilable, that no sect could have professed it for their creed. We may compare it to a machine composed of parts of various others, interfering among themselves in such a manner, that evidently it could never have been in operation.

We can therefore admit, with any confidence, only some very general conclusions respecting the doctrines of the Ophians.* Whether Chris-

* See the account of Irenæus, as before referred to, Lib. I. c. 30 ; and that of Origen in his work, *Against Celsus*, Lib. VI. Opp. I. pp. 648 - 661. Lib. VII. pp. 722, 723. Lib. III. p. 455.

tians or not, they appear to have been of the class of theosophic Gnostics, holding very disparaging opinions of the Creator, whom they regarded as the god of the Jews. They believed that he, with six other powers produced by him, informed and ruled seven spheres surrounding the earth (those of the sun and of the planets known to the ancients) ; and that through these spheres the soul had to pass after death in its ascent to the Spiritual World. The way, which might otherwise be barred by those powers, was open to such as were initiated in their mysteries, and had learned the proper invocations which the soul must address to them in its ascent, to obtain its passage. Their doctrines have the appearance of being a caricature of the doctrines of the proper Gnostics. Maintaining the common opinion that the Creator was *not spiritual*, and regarding him as being opposed to the manifestation and development of the spiritual principle in man, they honored the Serpent for having thwarted his narrow purposes, withdrawn our first parents from their allegiance to him, induced them to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and thus brought them the knowledge of "that Power which is over All." By a serpent the Phœnicians and Egyptians are said to have symbolized the Agathodæmon, the benevolent

power in nature (the god Cneph of the Egyptians);* and the Ophians, perhaps, regarded the Serpent under the same aspect. Clement of Alexandria once incidentally mentions the Ophians, in speaking of the origin of the names of different sects. Some, he says, are denominated "from their systems and from the objects they honor, as the Cainists and the Ophians."† The Cainists or Cainites (whom we shall have occasion to notice hereafter) are represented as magnifying Cain. The Ophians honored the Serpent.

Nothing concerning the Ophians would seem to be better established than this fact. But it is not stated by Irenæus. On the contrary, according to his account of their system, the Serpent was originally vicious, produced by the Creator in the dregs of matter, and treacherous to him. Afterwards, indeed, he appears employed by *Sophia* or Wisdom, the offspring of the Unknown God, the mother, but adversary of the Creator, for the purpose of seducing our first parents to eat of the forbidden fruit; by which they obtained a knowledge of the Supreme Divinity. But the Creator, who was himself de-

* Eusebii *Præparatio Evangelica*, Lib. I. c. 10.

† *Stromat.* VII. § 17. p. 900.

sirous of being regarded as the highest God, being in consequence angry with the Serpent, expelled him from heaven, where he had before dwelt, and cast him down to earth. After this fall he is made to correspond to the serpent of the Apocalypse, the Devil; and is represented as producing six other evil Powers (answering to the six subordinate Powers of the Creator), and as being, together with them, full of malice equally toward men and their Maker.

But we have good reason to believe that Iræneus, our earliest, and one of our two principal authorities, has fallen into great errors respecting the system of the Ophians, when we find him saying, notwithstanding what has been stated, that they affirmed the Serpent to be "the *Nous* (Intellect) himself"; * for this was the name by which theosophic Gnostics designated their first emanation from the Supreme Being. Elsewhere he says, that some of the Ophians maintained that Wisdom herself became the Serpent.† And in connection with this we cannot but be struck with the intrinsic improbability of the scheme that he ascribes to the sect; according to which the Devil was employed for the purpose of communicating spiritual wisdom and

* Lib. I. c. 30. § 5. p. 110.

† Ibid. § 15. p. 112.

a knowledge of the true God to ~~our~~ first parents. These, however, are but some of the inconsistencies that present themselves in the system that he has depicted.

That the Ophians held the Serpent in honor appears from the testimony of Clement and Origen, the indications furnished by Irenæus himself, the reports of later writers, and the evidence of their distinguishing name. Epiphanius says, that they glorified the Serpent as God, or as a god, and affirmed him to be Christ; * though, at the same time, with the grossest inconsistency, of which he seems to have had some indistinct consciousness, he gives a mutilated variation of the account of Irenæus by which the Serpent is identified with the Devil.† The same inconsistency exists in the relation of the author of the Addition to Tertullian, who follows Irenæus in part, but affirms that the Ophians placed the Serpent above Christ.‡ And Theodoret, who, I think, was embarrassed by the contradictions of his predecessors, says, that ~~some~~ of the Ophians worshipped the Serpent.§

* Indic. in Tom. III. Lib. I. p. 329. Hæres. XXXVII. §§ 1, 2. pp. 268, 269. § 5. pp. 271, 272.

† Ibid. §§ 4, 5. pp. 271, 272.

‡ Apud Tertullian. Opp. § 47. p. 290.

§ Hæret. Fab. Lib. I. n. 14. p. 205.

Modern writers have, in consequence, conjectured, either that there were two sorts of Ophians, or that there were two Serpents in their system, one celestial and the other terrestrial. But it would have been strange, if two classes of persons, one honoring the Serpent as a god, and the other regarding him as the Devil, had both been comprehended under the same name ; and as for the conjecture of two Serpents, it is certain that Irenæus, and the other ancient writers who mention the Ophians, speak only of one. A general solution of this and of other difficulties concerning them is to be found in the obscurity of the sect, in the consequent ignorance and inaccuracy of the reporters of their doctrines, and in the great probability that these doctrines were little settled among themselves.

Our purpose does not require us to enter further into the detail of their system, and to force our way through the crude accounts of ancient, and the hypotheses of modern writers. The labor would in any case be unprofitable. It may be the duty of one exploring these difficult subjects to spend his own time in pursuing obscure paths, tangled with briers, till he is satisfied that they lead to nothing ; but it can seldom be worth while to conduct others over

the same ground, that they may enjoy a like gratification.

The accounts of the Ophians belong, for the most part, to the fabulous history of the Gnostics. Nor should I have dwelt even so long upon this obscure and insignificant sect (for such we shall perceive it to have been), were it not for its having been magnified into importance by the discussions concerning it in modern times, and, still more, if it were not for the relation in which Origen says the Ophians stood to Christianity.

He speaks of them in his work against Celsus. Celsus had charged Christians with calling the Creator "an accursed god,"* upon the ground, as appears, that this was done by the Ophians; for it was his custom to accuse Christians of the extravagances and errors of heretical and pseudo-Christian sects. But Origen says in reply, that the Ophians were so far from being Christians, that they spoke of Jesus not less reproachfully than did Celsus himself, that they admitted no one into their fellowship without pronouncing curses against him, and that they were unwilling to hear his name even

* Ὡς ἄρα Χριστιανοὶ λέγουσι καταραμένον θεὸν τὸν δημιουργόν.
Contra Cels. Lib. VI. § 28. . Opp. I. 651.

as that of a wise and virtuous man.* Origen calls them a very obscure sect,† and speaks of their number as very small; there being, he says, none or very few remaining.‡ Celsus had brought forward a symbolical diagram, having reference to the ascent of the soul through the seven spheres of the Creator and his angels; and Origen is principally occupied by an account of this diagram, and the prayers inscribed upon it. It bore names given to the seven Powers, barbarous to Grecian ears, borrowed partly from the Old Testament, and partly, according to Origen, from the art of magic.§ But he says, that, though he had travelled much, and everywhere sought the acquaintance of men professing to know any thing, yet he had never met with any one who professed to explain it.||

In a passage antecedent to what I have quoted, Origen says, — “Celsus seems to me to have become acquainted with some sects that have no fellowship with us even in the name of Jesus. Thus, perhaps, he has heard of the Ophians or the Cainites, or of some others,

* Ibid. p. 652.

† Ibid. § 24. p. 648.

‡ Ibid. § 26. p. 650.

§ Ibid. § 32. pp. 656, 657.

|| Οὐδενὶ γοῦν περιτετεύχamen πρεσβεύοντι τὰ τοῦ διαγράμματος.
Ibid. § 24. p. 648.

holding doctrines wholly foreign from those of Jesus." *

Origen's account of the insignificance of the sect of the Ophians is confirmed, if it need confirmation, by the facts, that they are not *named* by Irenæus, nor are their peculiar doctrines referred to in his long confutation of different heresies, which forms the greater part of his work; that they are but once incidentally mentioned, as we have seen, by Clement of Alexandria; and that they are not noticed at all by Tertullian. Their want of notoriety appears likewise from the uncertainty respecting their name. None is given them by Irenæus. By Clement and Origen they are called Ophians (*Οφιανοί*); by Epiphanius, and some Latin writers who mention them, Ophites (*Οφίται*). Theodoret speaks of them as "Sethians, or Ophians, or Ophites"; † but Epiphanius and others make quite a distinct sect of the Sethians, ‡ and the probability is, that no proper sect ever existed under this name. § The obscurity of the Ophi-

* Cont. Cels. Lib. III. § 13. p. 455.

† Hæret. Fab. Lib. I. n. 14. p. 204.

‡ They are the thirty-ninth Heresy of Epiphanius. Opp. I. 284.

§ The Sethians have been mentioned before (p. 32, note). I conceive, that "Sethians" was, as there explained, only a name by which some of the Gnostics denoted *the spiritual*; Seth being

ans is made still more evident by the very confused and inconsistent accounts of their doctrines, accounts such as would not have been given of those of any well-known sect.*

There is, as we have seen, a disagreement between Origen on the one side, and Irenæus

regarded as their progenitor or prototype. Thus, in the *Doctrina Orientalis* (n. 54. p. 982), it is said, that "from Adam are produced three natures: the first irrational, of which was Cain; the second rational and righteous, of which was Abel; and the third spiritual, of which was Seth"; and Seth is then represented as producing a spiritual offspring, "whose citizenship is in heaven, and whom this world cannot contain." Irenæus gives a similar account of the opinions of the Valentiniens concerning the division of men into three kinds, corresponding to Cain, Abel, and Seth. (Lib. I. c. 7. § 5. p. 35.)

* Yet Matter, in his *Histoire Critique du Gnosticisme* (II. 260), states, in direct contradiction to all evidences and probability, that "the Ophites were equally celebrated and numerous"; and (p. 184) that, being "familiar with the doctrines of ancient Egypt, and those of the ancient East, as well as with Judaism and Christianity, they undertook to do justice to all the truth contained in these systems; they availed themselves of their myths, their symbols, and their teachings, and at the same time regarded all these doctrines, which were insufficient for them, as subordinate to the authority of a superior science, revealed to them through a more pure and direct communication with the world of intelligences."

I have quoted the work of Matter once before, and shall have occasion to quote it once again. It may not be wholly useless to give a few specimens of the manner in which the subject of the Gnostics has been treated, and of what have been presented as the last results of the inquiries respecting it.

and subsequent writers on the other, concerning the relation in which the Ophians stood to Christianity. Irenæus represents them as Christian heretics, Origen as an antichristian sect. The difference would have been of no account, if Origen had merely said that they were not Christians. According to Irenæus, they held that their doctrines were not openly taught by Christ, but that Jesus, whom they distinguished from Christ, remaining on earth eighteen months after his resurrection, then communicated them to a few of his disciples, who had capacity for such great mysteries.* Thus founding a system of their own invention on a supposititious basis, they might well be considered as not Christians. But Origen says, that they pronounced curses against Jesus. With so slight a hold as they had upon Christianity, and probably with no very fixed belief, they may have passed through a natural process of deterioration, during the interval between Irenæus and Origen. There is nothing improbable in the supposition, that a vain and foolish sect should first claim to be a sort of transcendental Christians, and then, finding themselves contemned by the great body of believers, and perceiving that their specula-

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. I. c. 30. § 14. p. 112.

tions were only embarrassed by their pretended faith, should have determined to rely on their own spiritual wisdom alone, and should have openly professed their rejection of Christianity with something of the spleen of apostates.

This is an obvious solution of the disagreement between Origen and Irenæus. But perhaps we are to look still farther for an explanation of it. With more or less analogy to other later sects, the theosophic Gnostics believed that they were guided to the truth by the divine light within, that spiritual nature which they considered as peculiar to themselves. Their systems consequently were the truth. They were derived from a higher source than reasoning, and were not amenable to it. They could be judged of only by those whose spiritual apprehensions were conformed to their reception. These principles, it is true, were not consistently acted upon. The Gnostics appear to have reasoned as well as they were able; and, as we shall hereafter see, were even reputed in their day subtle reasoners from the Scriptures. The claim of a higher internal source of knowledge, of the nature and operations of which reason is not the judge, is commonly resorted to only when all other modes of proof fail. Men do not condemn the aid of reason before it is with-

drawn. But it was the tendency of the self-confident state of mind which characterized the Gnostics, to lead them to reject instruction from without. A true Gnostic was his own teacher ; and though he found his system in the Gospel, yet his own mind was the book in which it was first read. Christianity was likely thus to become, in his view, an abstraction, the name for a body of opinions and imaginations, which he had embraced because he knew them to be true, independently of what others regarded as evidence of the divine authority of our religion. To him, indeed, its evidence might be merely its conformity to the revelations of his own spiritual nature ; and from such a state of mind the transition was easy to the proper infidelity ascribed to the Ophians.

Together with this, the theosophic Gnostics, generally, distinguished between the being who appeared as a man, Jesus, the son of the Creator, and the celestial being, Christ, or the Saviour, or the spiritual Jesus, who at the baptism of the former descended into him from the *Pleroma*.* To use the words of Tertullian, they

* *Irenæus*. Lib. I. c. 7. § 2. pp. 32, 33. Lib. III. c. 10. § 4. p. 186. *Ibid.* c. 11. §§ 1, 3. pp. 188, 189. *Conf.* Lib. I. c. 2. § 6. pp. 12, 13.

“made Christ and Jesus different beings ; the one had escaped from the midst of multitudes, the other was apprehended ; the one in the solitude of a mountain, overshadowed by a cloud, had been resplendent before three witnesses, the other, with no mark of distinction, had held common intercourse with men ; the one was magnanimous, but the other trembling ; and, at last, Jesus had been crucified, and Christ had risen.” * It was the Christ of the Pleroma whom they regarded as the teacher of divine truth ; and those truths which were most mysterious and transcendent they conceived him to have taught in secret meanings and enigmas, and in mere intimations and allusions, recorded in the Gospels, and in private unrecorded discourses addressed only to those capable of comprehending them. But the system of the Ophians appears throughout as a coarse exaggeration of the doctrines of the theosophic Gnostics. In common with those Gnostics, they regarded Jesus as the son of the Creator. But of the Creator they gave the most disparaging representations, and are said to have pronounced him accursed. It is not, then, difficult to believe that they extended like enmity to his son ; nor is

* De Carne Christi, c. 24. p. 325.

there any thing very improbable in supposing that they might have pretended to be, in some sort, followers of Christ, while they rejected Jesus as a divine teacher, and even proceeded to the extravagance, mentioned by Origen, of pronouncing curses on his name.* Thus in our own day, among the theologians of Germany, we may find speculations concerning an abstract, an ideal, or a symbolical Christ, who is an object of faith, while the history of Jesus is regarded as fabulous.

FROM what has been said, it may appear that sects and individuals who are not to be considered as Christians have been erroneously reckoned among the Gnostics. Nor is their existence difficult to be accounted for. Christianity soon became an object of universal attention. It was a new phenomenon in the intellectual world. A power unknown before was in ac-

* This solution of the disagreement between Origen and Iræneus implies the incorrectness of the account of the latter writer (already quoted, p. 232), that the Ophians affirmed that *Jesus* after his resurrection taught, for eighteen months, the mysteries of their doctrines to those who were capable of receiving them. But, besides the contradiction to Origen, the whole account of Iræneus (Lib. I. c. 30. §§ 12, 13, 14. pp. 111, 112) respecting the agency of *Christ* and of *Jesus* in the system of the Ophians is too obscure and incongruous to be entitled to much consideration.

tion, and spreading its influence far beyond the sphere to which it might seem to be confined. Our religion essentially affected the heathen philosophy contemporary with it, and introduced into it conceptions such as had not been previously entertained. The doctrines of our faith were, undoubtedly, more or less known to many who had not studied them in the Gospels, nor were acquainted with its evidences as a revelation from God. Though not received by such as of divine authority, and but imperfectly understood, they gave a new impulse to thought. Men's minds were thrown into a state of effervescence, new affinities operated, and new combinations of opinion were formed. There were, doubtless, those whose vanity prompted them to profess an acquaintance with the new barbaric philosophy, as they deemed it, and to represent themselves as having exercised a critical and discriminating judgment upon it, and as having discovered in it certain important views, and certain truths not before developed. In some of those affected by our religion, their imperfect and heartless knowledge of it would be rather destructive than renovating, breaking down all barriers of thought, and opening the way for wild speculations. Hence, as we may easily believe, new systems of opinion sprung up,

not Christian, but deriving some characteristic peculiarities from Christianity, — the systems held by those whom we have called pseudo-Christians.

BUT how, it may be asked, came the pseudo-Christians to be confounded with Christian heretics? Various considerations afford an answer to this question. As I have remarked, no well-defined boundary was apparent between the two classes. They passed insensibly into each other. In the reliance of the Gnostics upon the revelations of their own spiritual nature, we may perceive a tendency to infidelity. It was an error which would lead many to undervalue, and some to reject, the authority of Christ. The pseudo-Christians were reckoned among the Gnostics, because many of them held Gnostic opinions; and such opinions were attributed even to those, the Carpocratians, by whom they were not held. Another cause of this confusion may be found in the fact, that the Heathens would naturally blend together in one general class all those who, breaking away from the old forms of philosophy, were evidently involved in the new movement in the intellectual world produced by Christianity. The enemies of our religion charged upon Christians what might be truly or

falsely said of such sectaries as we have been considering. And, on the other hand, the catholic Christians, regarding the Gnostics as not true believers, as not belonging to the Christian body, were not careful to discriminate between them and those who, though corresponding with them in many respects, had yet no title to the Christian name. Hence it was, we may conceive, that the Gnostics were classed with individuals whose doctrines and whose lives many of them regarded with as strong disapprobation as did the catholic Christians.

In the preceding chapters we have taken a general view of the Gnostics, and of their relation to the catholic Christians. We have traced their external history, and attended to the respective characters of those writers from whom our knowledge of them is derived. We have considered their morals, — an essential point in determining how far they may be regarded as sincere though erroneous believers; and we have discriminated them from sectaries with whom they have been confounded, who, though borrowing some conceptions from Christianity, were not Christians.

It has been suggested, likewise, that the oc-

casion of Gnosticism was to be found in the aversion of the Gentiles to Judaism, in the form in which it was presented to their minds ; and to this subject we will next attend.

CHAPTER VI.

ON Gnosticism, CONSIDERED AS A SEPARATION OF JUDAISM FROM CHRISTIANITY.

“EVERY heretic, as far as I know,” says Tertullian, “ridicules the whole of the Old Testament.”* “To separate the Law from the Gospel,” he observes in another place, “is the special and principal object of Marcion.”† “The labor of the heretics,” he says, “is not in building up an edifice of their own, but in destroying the truth. They undermine ours to erect their own. Take away from them the Law of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Creator God, and they will have nothing to urge against us.”‡ “It is the case with all those,” says Irenæus, “who hold pernicious doctrines, that, being influenced by the opinion that the Law of Moses is different from and contrary to the doctrine of the Gospel, they have not turned

* *Advers. Marcion. Lib. V. c. 5. p. 467.*

† *Ibid. Lib. I. c. 19. p. 374.*

‡ *De Præscriptione Hæreticorum, c. 42. p. 217.*

to consider the causes of the difference between the two Testaments." *

Origen, in maintaining the necessity of interpreting the Scriptures allegorically, says, that many have fallen into great errors from not understanding them in their spiritual sense. He first instances the unbelieving Jews, who, he says, rejected the Messiah in consequence of interpreting the prophecies concerning him literally. He then proceeds thus: — "*The heretics too, when they read, A fire has blazed from my wrath; † — I am a jealous God, requiting the sins of fathers upon children to the third and fourth generation; ‡ — I repent that I have anointed Saul to be king; § — I am the God who makes peace and creates evil; || — and, in another place, There is no evil in a city which the Lord hath not wrought; ¶ — and yet further, Evil came down from the Lord to the gates of Jerusalem; ** — and, An evil spirit from the Lord tormented Saul; †† — when they read these and ten thousand other similar passages,*

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. III. c. 12. § 12. p. 198.

† Jeremiah xv. 14.

‡ Exodus xx. 5.

§ 1 Samuel xv. 11.

|| Isaiah xlv. 7.

¶ Amos iii. 6., so quoted by Origen.

** Micah i. 12.

†† 1 Samuel xvi. 14.

they do not indeed venture to reject the divine origin of the Scriptures [the Jewish Scriptures], but they believe them to have proceeded from the Creator whom the Jews worship. Regarding him, in consequence, as imperfect and not good, they think that the Saviour came to make known the more perfect God, who, they affirm, is not the Creator. Holding various opinions concerning this subject, and having deserted the Creator, who is the unoriginated only God, they have given themselves up to their own fabrications; and have formed mythological systems, according to which they explain the production of things visible, and of other things, invisible, the existence of which they have imagined. But indeed," continues Origen, "the more simple of those who boast that they belong to the church, who regard none as superior to the Creator, and in this do well, have yet such conceptions of him as are not to be entertained of the most cruel and most unjust of men," — in consequence, as he immediately remarks, of their understanding the Jewish Scriptures, not "according to their spiritual sense, but according to the naked letter." *

"The most ungodly and irreligious among the

* De Principiis, Lib. IV. § 8. Opp. I. 164, seqq.

heretics," says Origen in his Commentary on Leviticus, "not understanding the difference between *visible* Judaism and *intelligible* Judaism, that is, between Judaism in its outward form and Judaism in its hidden purport, have at once separated themselves from Judaism, and from the God who gave these Scriptures and the whole Law, and have fabricated for themselves another God beside him who gave the Law and the Prophets, and made heaven and earth." *

Of the opinions of Ptolemy, the Valentinian, respecting the Jewish Law, we have a detailed account in his Letter to Flora, which he seems to have intended as a sort of introduction to Gnosticism, — as an exposition and defence of its fundamental doctrine. He begins by stating, that some believe the Law to have been ordained by God the Father, and others by the Adversary, Satan. Both opinions he rejects as altogether erroneous. It could not have proceeded from the Perfect God and Father; because it is imperfect, and contains commands unsuitable to the nature and will of such a God; nor, on the other hand, can the Law, which forbids iniquity, be ascribed to the Evil Being. His own opinion, he conceives, may be proved

* Philocalia, c. 1. ad finem. Opp. II. 192.

by the words of Christ, to which alone he says we may safely trust in investigating the subject. It is, that the Law contained in the Pentateuch does not proceed from a single lawgiver, consequently not from the god of the Jews alone. A part of it is to be ascribed to him ; another part was given by Moses on his own authority ; and a third portion consists of laws interpolated by the Elders of the people. In proof that some laws proceeded from Moses alone, he quotes the words of Christ, — “ *Moses on account of the hardness of your hearts permitted you to put away your wives ; but in the beginning it was not so, for God established the connection, and what the Lord has joined together, let no man put asunder.* ” * To the laws interpolated by the Elders he regards Christ as referring, when he taught the Jews that they had set aside the Law of God by the traditions of their Elders.† Of that portion of the Law which he ascribes to the god of the Jews, some of the precepts, according to him, are wholly unmixed with evil. They constitute the Law properly so called, that Law which the Saviour came not to destroy, but to perfect. They are those of the Decalogue.‡

* Matt. xix. 4 - 8.

† Mark vii. 3 - 9.

‡ There is here, apparently, an example of that inconsistency

Other precepts have a mixture of something bad and wrong, and were abrogated by the Saviour. Such, for instance, is the law respecting retaliation, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." A third class, consisting of the ceremonial law, relates to things typical of those to come, more spiritual and excellent, in the Christian dispensation. Why the laws of the god of the Jews should contain types of Christianity, Ptolemy does not explain in this Letter. He probably accounted for it through a secret influence from the Pleroma, under which, as we shall hereafter see, the Creator was represented by the Valentinians as acting.

Ptolemy next proceeds to answer the inquiry, Who was that god who gave the Law? He was not, he repeats, the Perfect God, nor was he Satan; but he was the Fashioner and Maker of this World, and of the beings contained in it, not good (that is, not possessing unmingled

of which we find so much in the theological speculations of the ancients. Christ, according to Ptolemy, retained and perfected "the ten commandments." But Ptolemy believed these to have been given, not by the Supreme Being, but by the god of the Jews. Now the first of them is, "Thou shalt have no other God beside me"; a command which, according to his system, it is impossible that Christ should have confirmed, since Ptolemy regarded him as having come to reveal another and far greater God than the god of the Jews.

goodness), like the Supreme God, nor evil and wicked like Satan; but standing in the midst between them, one who may properly be called Just, as one who rewards and punishes according to his measure of goodness; not unoriginated, like the Supreme God, but being an image of him.

In this account of his opinions, Ptolemy probably gives as favorable a view as was entertained by any Gnostic of the Jewish Law, and of the god of the Jews.

It is to be observed, that the Gnostics did not reject the Pentateuch, and the other books of the Old Testament, as unworthy of credit. On the contrary, their system was founded on the supposition, that those books contained a correct account of the Jewish dispensation, and of the events connected with it. Difficulties and objections then pressed upon them. There was much that offended their reason, their moral sentiments, and their prejudices as Gentiles. Receiving the history as true, and understanding it in its obvious sense, they could not believe that the god of the Jews was the same being as the God of Christians. Thus they were led to separate the Law from the Gospel, and to introduce the agency of another being, wholly distinct from the Supreme God, in the govern-

ment of the world. The corner-stone of Gnosticism was thus laid.

BUT in regarding many of the representations given of God in the Old Testament as unworthy of the Supreme Being, the Gnostics did not stand alone. The more intelligent of the catholic Christians contemporary with them strongly felt and expressed these and other objections to which the Old Testament was, in their view, exposed, if understood in its obvious sense. This feeling is shown in the quotations before given from Origen, and the subject well deserves further consideration ; for there are few of more importance in the history of Christian opinions.

In a Note to this volume * there is some notice of the opinions of the author of the Clementine Homilies concerning the Old Testament. A great part of that work is directed against the doctrines of the Gnostics, represented as maintained by Simon Magus. There is much relating to the objections to the god of the Jews (that is, in the view of the writer, to the Supreme God), which the Gnostics derived from

* See Additional Note, B.

the Old Testament ; and of these objections the author, under the person of Peter, presents a bold solution. He gives up at once to reprobation the passages on which they were founded, maintaining that they are false representations of God. He represents them as existing in the Jewish Scriptures, through the permitted agency of Satan, to serve as a test for distinguishing between those who are, and those who are not, willing to believe evil concerning God.* According to him, what in those Scriptures is accordant with right conceptions of God is to be received as true, and what is not so is to be rejected as false.† His general notions concerning them appear in the following passage. "There are some," he says, referring to some among the Jews, "who, receiving as true the unworthy and false representations of God in the Jewish Scriptures, understand not his essential divinity and might ; but regarding him as ignorant, and rejoicing in slaughter, and remitting sins for the gift of sacrifices, and, still more, as deceiving, and speaking falsely, and committing every sort of injustice, maintain while they are committing sin that they are leading relig-

* Homil. II. §§ 38 - 52. Homil. III. § 5.

† Homil. II. § 40, seqq. Homil. III. § 42, seqq.

ious lives, their actions being conformed to those of God." *

BUT in his view of the general character of the Old Testament, the author of the Homilies stood apart from the other Christian writers of the second and third centuries. They received its books from the Jews, and received them with the Jewish notions of their divine authority, and were therefore obliged to resort to modes different from those of the Gnostics, or the author of the Clementine Homilies, for solving the difficulties which they equally felt.

IN the solution that I shall first mention, as resorted to by the catholic Christians, will be perceived that remarkable resemblance, without coincidence, which often appears between their doctrines and those of the Gnostics. In comparing them together, we see sometimes, as in the present case, a striking likeness fashioned out of materials essentially different, while in other cases the material is the same, but moulded into a different form. In the solution of which I now speak, the Logos of the catholic Christians takes the place of the Creator of the

* Homil. XVIII. § 19.

Gnostics as the god of the Jews ; those representations of the Divinity in the Old Testament, which catholic Christians, equally with the Gnostics, regarded as incompatible with the character of the Supreme Being, being referred by them to the Logos.

In his Dialogue with Trypho, Justin Martyr says : — “ I will endeavour to prove to you from the Scriptures, that he who is said to have appeared to Abraham, to Jacob, and to Moses, and is called God, is another god [that is, divine being], different from the God who created all things ; another, I say, numerically, not in will ; for I affirm that he never did any thing at any time but what it was the will of Him who created the world, and above whom there is no other God, that he should do and say.” *

Justin, among many other similar proofs that there is another god beside the Supreme God, quotes those passages in which it is said that God ascended from Abraham ; that God spoke to Moses ; that the Lord came down to see the tower of Babel which the sons of men had built ; and that God shut the door of the ark after Noah had entered. “ Do not suppose,” he says, “ that the unoriginated God either descended or

* Dial. cum Tryph. p. 259.

ascended ; for the ineffable Father and Lord of All neither comes anywhere, nor walks, nor sleeps, nor arises ; but remains in his own place, wherever that may be." After describing the greatness, omniscience, and omnipresence of the Supreme God, he proceeds, — " How, then, can he speak to any one, or be seen by any one, or appear in a little portion of the earth, when the people could not behold on Sinai even the glory of him whom he sent. Neither Abraham, therefore, nor Isaac, nor Jacob, nor any other man, ever saw the Father, the ineffable Lord of All, even of Christ himself ; but they saw him who, through the will of the Father, was a god, His Son, and likewise His angel, as ministering to His purposes." *

Tertullian regarded the Son, or the Logos, as having been the minister of God in creation and in all his subsequent works. To him he ascribes whatever actions are ascribed to God in the Old Testament. " He always descended to converse with men, from the time of Adam to that of the patriarchs and prophets. He who was to assume a human body and soul was even then acquainted with human affections ; asking Adam, as if ignorant, Where art thou, Adam ? repent-

* Dial. cum Tryph. pp. 410, 411.

ing of having made man, as if wanting pre-science ; putting Abraham to trial, as if ignorant of what was in man ; offended and reconciled with the same individuals ; — and so it is with regard to all which the heretics [the Gnostics] seize upon to object to the Creator, as unworthy of God, they being ignorant that those things were suitable to the Son, who was about to submit to human affections, to thirst, hunger, and tears, and even to be born and to die. How can it be that God, the Omnipotent, the Invisible, whom *no man hath seen or can see*, who *dwells in light inaccessible*, walked in the evening in paradise, seeking Adam, and shut the door of the ark after Noah had entered, and cooled himself under an oak with Abraham, and called to Moses from a burning bush ? These things would not be credible concerning the Son of God, if they were not written ; perhaps they would not be credible concerning the Father, if they were.” *

In his work against Marcion, Tertullian, after explaining various particular passages of the Old Testament objected to by him, says that he will give a summary answer to the rest. “ I will give,” are his words, “ a simple and certain ac-

* *Advers. Praxeam*, c. 16. pp. 509, 510.

count of whatever else you have objected to the Creator, as mean, and weak, and unworthy. It is, that God could not have had intercourse with men, unless he had assumed the feelings and affections of humanity, by which he humbled and tempered to human infirmity the intolerable might of his majesty. Unworthy indeed it was in respect to himself, but necessary for man; and therefore became worthy of God, since nothing can be so worthy of God as the salvation of man." Marcion himself believed that God had manifested himself as Christ, and Tertullian proceeds, in language so foreign from what we are accustomed to, that it hardly admits of a literal translation:—"Why do you think that those humiliations [the facts in the Old Testament which Marcion so regarded] are unworthy of our God, seeing that they are more tolerable than the contumelies of the Jews, and the cross, and the tomb? Are not those humiliations ground for concluding * that Christ, subjected as he was to the accidents of man, came from the same God whose assumption of humanity is made by you a matter of reproach?

* "*An hæ sunt pusillitates quæ jam præjudicare debebunt,*" &c. For "*An,*" we may read "*An non,*" as the sense (about which there is no uncertainty) seems to require.

For we further maintain, that Christ has always been the agent of the Father in his name, that it was he who from the beginning was conversant with men, who had intercourse with the patriarchs and prophets; being the son of the Creator, his Logos, whom he made his Son by producing him from himself, and then set him over all that he disposed and willed; 'making him a little lower than the angels,' as was written by David. In thus being made lower than the angels he was prepared by the Father for those assumptions of humanity with which you find fault. He learnt from the beginning, being then already a man, what he was to be at last. It was he who descended, he who questioned, he who demanded, he who swore. But that the Father has been seen by none, the Gospel common to us both* bears witness; for in this Christ says, — 'No one has known the Father but the Son.' For he had pronounced in the Old Testament likewise, 'No one shall see God and live'; thus determining that the Father is invisible, in whose name and by whose authority he who became visible as the Son of God was God. Thus whatever you require as worthy of God will be found in the invisible Fa-

* That is, the Gospel of Luke as used by Marcion.

ther, remote from human intercourse, calm, and, if I may so speak, the God of the philosophers; but whatever you censure as unworthy will be ascribed to the Son, who was seen, and heard, and had intercourse with men, who sees the Father and ministers to him, who unites in himself humanity and divinity, being in his powers divine, in his humiliation a man, that what he parts with from his divinity he may confer on man. All, in fine, that you regard as dishonorable to my God is the pledge of human salvation." *

IN the passage just quoted, beside the doctrine, that the Logos, or Son, was the being represented as God in the Old Testament, and that to him actions might be ascribed which would be unsuitable to the Father, there appears another conception, which is often presented in the writings of Tertullian, and is employed by him elsewhere to answer the objections of the Gnostics to the Old Testament. It is, that, in both the Jewish and Christian dispensations, the means used by God to effect his purposes are such as in the view of man may appear unworthy, incongruous, and contemptible. He regards

* *Advers. Marcion. Lib. II. c. 27. pp. 395, 396.*

this as characteristic of the special manifestations of God. He grounds the conception particularly on a passage of St. Paul, which he frequently quotes or alludes to:—"God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put wise men to shame, and the weak things of the world God has chosen to put to shame the strong, and the mean things of the world, and the despised, has God chosen; and things that are nought, to do away what exist."* Tertullian, understanding this passage as he did, was able to reconcile himself to much that might otherwise have offended him in the Old Testament. "Nothing," he says, "ordained by God is truly mean, and ignoble, and contemptible, but only what proceeds from man. But many things in the Old Testament may be charged upon the Creator as foolish, and weak, and shameful, and little, and contemptible. What more foolish, what more weak, than the exaction by God of bloody sacrifices and sweet-smelling holocausts? What more weak than the cleansing of cups and beds? What more shameful than to inflict a new blemish on the ruddy flesh of an infant? What so mean as the law of retaliation? What so contemptible as the prohibition of certain

* 1 Corinthians i. 27, 28.

kinds of food? Every heretic, as far as I know, ridicules the whole of the Old Testament. For God chose the foolish things of the world to confound its wisdom." *

It is to be observed, however, that Tertullian had, in a former part of his work,† ably defended the reasonableness of all the requisitions of the Law of which he here speaks, except circumcision; and that the defence of the Old Testament in its literal or obvious sense was not neglected by other fathers.

BUT, in connection with those that have been mentioned, another solution was found for its difficulties in the supposition of a hidden or allegorical sense. This imaginary sense was believed not to be expressed by the words in their direct meaning, but to be one of which the direct meaning presented an allegory, a type, a symbolical representation, or an enigmatical expression. The allegorical mode of interpretation was unsupported by any tenable reasoning, it proceeded on no settled principles, it had no definite limits in its application, there was not, even professedly, any test of its cor-

* *Advers. Marcion. Lib. V. c. 5. p. 467.*

† *Ibid. Lib. II. c. 18, seqq.*

rectness, nor, generally, does there appear to have been a distinct apprehension that the meaning educed by it was intended by the writer to whose words it was ascribed.* The

* The following may serve as a specimen of allegorical interpretation. In Exodus, xv. 23 - 27, it is related that the Israelites, after crossing the Red Sea, came to the waters of Marah, which were so bitter that they could not drink them ; but that the Lord showed Moses a tree, which when he cast into the water, it became sweet ; and that afterwards the Israelites arrived at Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm-trees.

"It is very strange," says Origen, "that God should show Moses a tree to cast into the water, to make it sweet. Could he not make the water sweet without a tree? But let us see what beauty there is in the inner sense." He accordingly explains, that, allegorically understood, the bitter waters of Marah denote the Jewish Law, which in its literal purport is bitter enough ; so that of its bitterness the true people of God cannot drink. "What, then, is the tree which God showed to Moses? Solomon teaches us, when he says of Wisdom, that *she is a tree of life to all who embrace her*. If, therefore, the tree of wisdom, Christ, be cast into the Law," and show us how it ought to be understood (I compress several clauses into these words), "then the water of Marah becomes sweet, and the bitterness of the letter of the Law is changed into the sweetness of spiritual intelligence ; and then the people of God can drink of it." Origen afterwards remarks on the subsequent arrival of the Israelites at Elim with its twelve springs and seventy palm-trees. "Do you think," he asks, "that any reason can be given why they were not first led to Elim? If we follow the history alone, it does not much edify us to know where they first went, and where they next went. But if we search out the mystery hidden in these things, we find the order of faith. The people is first led to the letter of the Law, from which, while this retains its bitterness, it cannot depart. But

subject was still further confused by the circumstance, that the term "to allegorize" was applied to the use of simply figurative language, of which the true meaning was sufficiently obvious; and such language, in consequence, was confounded with that to which an imaginary mystical sense was assigned. Thus, Clement of Alexandria, in remarking on the words of our Saviour, "The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep," speaks of Christ as by *sheep*

when the Law is made sweet by the tree of life, and begins to be spiritually understood, then the people passes from the Old Testament to the New, and comes to the twelve fountains of the Apostles. In the same place, also, are found seventy palm-trees. For not alone the twelve Apostles preached faith in Christ, but it is related that seventy others were sent to preach the word of God, through whom the world might acknowledge the palms of the victory of Christ." Homil. in Exod. VII. §§ 1, 3. Opp. II. 151, 152.

Such is the style of interpretation which, intermixed with good sense, just remarks, and correct moral and religious sentiments, prevails throughout the expository works of Philo and Origen, and is frequent in the writings of many of the other fathers beside Origen; especially, as regards our present purpose, in those of Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Clement, and Tertallian.

"Ce qu'il y a de commode," says Le Clerc, "dans cette manière d'expliquer la Bible, c'est que l'on fait de son texte la même chose que les Peripateticiens font de leur matière première, *que neque est quid, neque quale, neque quantum, neque quicquam eorum quibus ens denominatur*. On le tourne comme on veut; on lui donne la forme que l'on trouve à propos; et l'on y trouveroit également son compte, quand il auroit dit tout le contraire." Bibliothèque Universelle, Tom. XII. p. 20.

expressing *allegorically* a flock of men.* As to Origen, though it is not probable that he had ever so stated the subject to his own mind, yet his customary modes of speaking in relation to it imply that all interpretation of Scripture which is not literal is allegorical, and that there is no choice but of the one mode or the other.

The allegorical mode of interpretation thus affords a striking illustration of the indistinct conceptions and unsubstantial reasoning of the ancients. For we must not suppose that it was adopted by the fathers alone, or confined in its application to the Scriptures. It was prevalent in the age of which we speak. It had for a long time been applied by the heathen philosophers to the offensive fables of their mythology, the scandal of which they endeavoured to remove by representing them as symbolical representations of certain truths concerning the physical and moral world; a mode of explanation which, with little good sense, has been continued to our own day.† The revela-

* Εἰ δὲ ἡ ποίμνη ἡ ἀλληγορουμένη πρὸς τοῦ Κυρίου οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἢ ἀγέλη τις ἀνθρώπων ἐστίν, κ. τ. λ. Stromat. I. p. 421. The same use of ἀλληγορέω, or an equivalent term, may be found on p. 104. ll. 17, 30; p. 120. ll. 20, 29; p. 138. l. 5; p. 148. l. 5; p. 528. l. 21; p. 708. l. 11; p. 771. l. 23; p. 806. l. 17.

† On this subject see (in the "Bibliothèque Choisie," Tom.

tions in the heathen mysteries probably consisted in great part of such interpretations of the heathen mythology. The philosophical Jews also had resorted to it in the exposition of the Old Testament ; and, in applying it to the same book, the fathers only followed in the broad path which had been cleared by Philo. His explanations of the Old Testament are throughout allegorical. He had the same feeling as the Christian fathers of the objections to which it is liable, if understood in its obvious sense, and of the supposed necessity of recurring to a hidden meaning. Thus, in reference to the account of the formation of Eve, he affirms that “ what is said concerning it is fabulous ” ; * that is, that the obvious meaning is fabulous. “ How can any one,” he asks, “ credit that a woman or any human being was made out of the rib of a man ? ” And after various objections to the story, he proceeds to convert it into an allegory.† Speaking of the serpent which tempted Eve, and of the brazen serpent of Moses, he says, — “ These things, as they are written, are like prodigies and portents ; but when allegorically

VII. p. 88, seqq.) the remarks of Le Clerc, who in the compass of a few pages treats it with his customary clearness and judgment.

* Τὸ ῥητὸν ἐπὶ τούτου μυθώδες ἐστὶ.

† Legis Allegoriæ, Lib. II. Opp. I. 70. Ed. Mangey.

explained, the fabulous immediately disappears, and the truth is manifestly discovered."* After quoting the words, "And God planted a garden in Eden," he says, that to understand this of his planting vines, or fruit-trees of any kind, would be great and hardly curable folly. "We must have recourse to allegory, the friend of clear-sighted men."† Thus, also, in commenting on the passage, "Cain departed from the face of God," he regards it as proving that what is written in the books of Moses is to be understood *tropologically* (that is, allegorically), the apparent meaning presented at first sight being far from the truth. "For if God have a face, and he who wills to leave him may easily remove elsewhere, why do we reject the impiety of the Epicureans, or the atheism of the Egyptians, or the mythological fables of which the world is full?"‡ Many similar passages occur in his writings.§

* Ταῦτα δ' οὕτω μὲν λεγόμενα φάσμασιν ἔοικε καὶ τέρασιν.
 'Εν δὲ ταῖς δι' ὑπονοιῶν ἀποδόσει τὸ μὲν μυθῶδες ἐκποδῶν
 οἴχεται, τὸ δ' ἀληθὲς ἀρίδην εὐρίσκεται. De Agriculturâ. Opp.
 I. 315.

† De Plantatione Noe. Opp. I. 334. Conf. De Mundi Opificio.
 Opp. I. 37. Legis Allegoriæ, Lib. I. Opp. I. 32.

‡ De Posteritate Caini. Opp. I. 226.

§ As, for example, Legis Allegoriæ, Lib. II. Opp. I. 70. Lib.
 III. 88. Quod Deterius Potiori insidiari soleat. Opp. I. 194,

Nor was the allegorical mode of understanding the Jewish Scriptures introduced by Philo. He celebrates the Therapeutæ, a sect among the Jews who devoted themselves to religious exercises and meditation, and of them he relates, that they occupied much of their time in the allegorical exposition of the sacred writings, regarding the literal meaning as symbolical of hidden senses, expressed enigmatically. He says, that they compared the whole Law to an animal, its body being the literal precepts, but its soul the invisible sense lying treasured up in the words; and adds, that in their allegorical exposition they had for models the writings of ancient men, the founders of the sect.* Elsewhere, Philo repeatedly refers to this mode of interpretation as common. "I have heard," he says in one place, "another explanation from inspired men, who consider most things in the Laws as visible and spoken symbols of the invisible and unspeakable."† The confidence with which, throughout his works, he proceeds on the system of allegorical exposition, without explaining or defending it, shows that it was

209, 223. De Posteritate Caini. Opp. I. 232, 234, 235. Quod Deus sit immutabilis. Opp. I. 292 — et alibi.

* De Vita Contemplativa. Opp. II. 475, 483.

† De Specialibus Legibus. Opp. II. 329.

well known and admitted. Its general prevalence is likewise made evident by the fact, that it appears in quotations from the Jewish Scriptures in the New Testament, particularly in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

The Christian fathers, from the beginning, adopting the conceptions of their age, interpreted the Old Testament allegorically. Justin Martyr in his Dialogue with Trypho abounds in such expositions of it; but in a controversy with a Jew he was not called upon to defend it. He makes evident, however, his notions of its character, as requiring to be thus explained. After having represented the blood of the pass-over, with which the Israelites sprinkled their door-posts when the first-born of the Egyptians were destroyed, and the scarlet line which the harlot Rahab hung out when Jericho was taken, as both intended for types of the blood of Christ, shed for the deliverance of men, he thus addresses Trypho: — “ But you, who explain these things in a low sense, impute much weakness to God, through understanding them so simply, and not inquiring into the true purport of what is said. For thus [that is, by understanding the Scriptures thus literally] even Moses may be judged a transgressor; since, after commanding that no likeness should be made

of any thing either in heaven, or on the earth, or in the sea, he himself made a brazen serpent, and, setting it up for a sign, directed those who were bitten to look upon it; and by looking upon it they were saved. So the serpent, then, whom God cursed in the beginning, and destroyed, as Isaiah proclaims, with a great sword,* will be thought to have then saved the people; and thus we shall understand such things foolishly, like your teachers, and not as symbolical.” †

Irenæus does not resort to allegorical interpretation in directly answering the objections of the Gnostics to the Old Testament. He defends it in its obvious meaning, in much the same manner as modern divines have done. But, in maintaining its connection with Christianity, he represents it as full of types, shadowing forth in their hidden senses the coming dispensation; and in such hidden senses it appears that he himself was disposed to take refuge from the difficulties that pressed upon its obvious meaning. Thus he says, — “One of the ancient presbyters relieved my mind by teaching me, that when the wrong actions of the pa-

* Isaiah xxvii. 1.

† Dial. cum Tryph. pp. 374, 375.

triarchs and prophets are simply related in the Scriptures without any censure, we ought not to become accusers (for we are not more observing than God, nor can we be above our master), but to look for a type. For no one of those actions which are mentioned thus uncensured in the Scriptures is without its purpose." *

Tertullian does not dwell at length on the objections of the heretics to the Old Testament in any of his works except that against Marcion. Marcion rejected the allegorical mode of interpretation ;† and in reasoning with him Tertullian defends, and with ability, portions of the Jewish Law and history understood in their obvious sense, except so far as this sense was modified by his belief, before mentioned, concerning the agency of the Logos. But he abounds, at the same time, in allegorical expositions of the Old Testament, some of them exceedingly forced. He speaks of "the secret meanings of the Law, spiritual as it is, and prophetic, and full of figures in almost every part." ‡ And, in another place, he describes God, the God of the Old Tes-

* Cont. Hæres. Lib. IV. c. 31. § 1. p. 268.

† Tertullian. Advers. Marcion. Lib. II. c. 21. p. 392. Lib. III. cc. 4, 5. pp. 398, 399. Origen. Comment. in Matth. Tom. XV. § 3. Opp. III. 655. In Epist. ad Romanos, Lib. II. Opp. IV. 494, 495.

‡ Advers. Marcion. Lib. II. c. 19. p. 391.

tament, as "making foolish the wisdom of the world, choosing its foolish things and disposing them for man's salvation"; this being, he says, the hidden wisdom of which the Apostle speaks, "which was in foolish, and little, and shameful things, which lay hid under figures, allegories, and enigmas, and was afterwards to be revealed in Christ." *

Celsus, who lived in the second century, was acquainted with this manner of explaining and defending the Old Testament, and expressed himself vehemently against it. "He attacks the history of Moses," says Origen, "and finds fault with those who explain it tropologically and allegorically." † "He seems to me to have heard of writings containing the allegories of the Law, which if he had read, he would not have said, — 'The pretended allegories written concerning these fables are far more offensive and absurd than the fables themselves; for, with marvellous and altogether senseless folly, they bring together things which can in no way whatever be fitted to one another.' He seems," continues Origen, "to refer to the writings of Philo, or to others still more ancient, as those of Aristobulus." ‡

* *Advers. Marcion. Lib. V. c. 6. p. 467.*

† *Cont. Cels. Lib. I. § 17. Opp. I. 336.*

‡ *Ibid. Lib. IV. § 51. p. 542.*

But Origen did not mean to imply that Celsus, in his attack on the allegorical interpretations of the Old Testament, had not in view Christian allegorists as well as Jewish. He had a little before quoted from him a passage, in which Celsus, speaking of some of the narratives in Genesis and Exodus, says, that "the more rational of the Jews and Christians turn them into allegories. They take refuge in allegory because they are ashamed of them." In reply, Origen makes a strong retort upon the obscene fables of the mythology of the Pagans, which their philosophers represented as allegories.*

The early fathers, in general, allegorized freely in their expositions of the Old Testament, and evidently regarded this mode of exposition as a means of removing objections to it. But no other of their number has recurred to this method so confidently as Origen, — of whom Jerome, before he began to regard his opinions as heretical, declared, that "none but an ignorant man would deny, that, next after the Apostles, he was the master of the churches."† Origen, proceeding on the hypothesis of the verbal inspiration of the

* Cont. Cels. § 48. p. 540 ; § 50. p. 542.

† Præfat. in Lib. de Interpret. Nomin. Hebræor. Opp. II. 3.

Scriptures, allegorized the New Testament as well as the Old, perceiving no other method of solving the great difficulties which, on that hypothesis, often presented themselves to his mind in the verbal meaning of the Gospels and Epistles.* His notions of the Old Testament appear in the passages already quoted; but it may be worth while to adduce a few others.

“There are many of the laws of Moses,” he says, “which, as regards their literal observance, are absurd or impossible. It is absurd to forbid the eating of vultures,† a kind of food which none, however pressed by hunger, would resort to. An infant not circumcised on the eighth day, it is said, shall be cut off from the people.‡ Were any law which was to be understood literally required respecting this matter, it ought to have been, that the parents, or those who have the care of such an infant, should suffer death.”§ In one of his Homilies, speaking of the directions concerning the sin-

* See Vol. I. p. 184.

† Leviticus xi. 14. Deut. xiv. 13.

‡ Genesis xvii. 12, 14.

§ De Principiis, Lib. IV. § 17. Opp. I. p. 176. Origen treats at length of the subject of allegorical interpretation, in the work just referred to, p. 164, seqq.

offering in Leviticus,* he says, — “All this, as I have often before observed, when the passage was recited in the church, unless it be understood in a sense different from the literal, is more likely to be a stumbling-block in the way of Christianity, and to overthrow it, than to be matter for exhortation and edification.”† Elsewhere, in treating of the distinction of clean and unclean food, after having allegorized the laws respecting it, he thus goes on: — “If we say that the great God promulgated laws to men which are to be *thus* understood, I think that they will appear worthy of the divine majesty. But if we cleave to the letter, and receive them as they are understood by the Jews, or as they are commonly understood, I should blush to affirm and profess that such laws were given by God. The laws of men, as those of the Romans, or of the Athenians, or of the Lacedæmonians, would seem more refined and reasonable. But if the Law of God be understood, as is taught by the Church, then it evidently surpasses all human laws, and may truly be believed to be the Law of God.”‡

* Ch. vi. 24 – 30.

† Homil. in Leviticum V. § 1. Opp. II. 205.

‡ Ibid. VII. § 5. Opp. II. 226.

A few more passages will sufficiently illustrate Origen's opinions on this subject. Speaking of different narratives in Exodus, he says, — "These are not written to afford us instruction in history, nor is it to be supposed that the divine books relate the acts of the Egyptians; but what is written is written to afford us instruction in doctrine and morals. * We, who have learned to regard all that is written, not as containing narratives of ancient times, but as written for our discipline and use, perceive that what is here read takes place *now*, not only in this world, which is figuratively called Egypt, but in each one of ourselves." † This mode of allegorizing Egypt into the world and the inferior part of our nature was, with much else of the same character, derived by Origen from Philo. ‡ In answering certain objections of Celsus, founded on the Old Testament, he has these words: § — "We say the Law is twofold, literal and allegorical, as others have taught before us. The literal has been pronounced, not so much by us as by God, speaking in one of the prophets, to consist of ordinances not good, and statutes not good; ||

* Homil. in Exod. I. § 5. Opp. II. 131.

† Ibid. II. § 1. Opp. II. 133.

‡ Philo de Migratione Abrahami, *passim*.

§ Cont. Cels. Lib. VII. § 20. Opp. I. 708.

|| Ezekiel xx. 25.

but the allegorical, according to the same prophet, is said by God to consist of good ordinances and good statutes.* Certainly the prophet does not here [in speaking of the Law in the passages referred to] assert manifest contradictions. And, conformably to this, Paul says, *The letter*, that is, the Law understood literally, *kills*, but the spirit, that is, the Law understood allegorically, *gives life.*" †

The allegorical or hidden meaning was divided into the moral and the mystical, or spiritual; the moral being supposed to relate to morality, and the mystical to the doctrines of religion. In remarking on the declaration of St. Paul, *The works of the flesh are apparent*,‡ Origen allegorizes the passage as referring to the literal sense of the Old Testament. This was figura-

* Ezekiel xx. 11.

† 2 Cor. iii. 6. — This is a passage, which, from the time of Origen to the present day, has been often so quoted as to pervert its meaning. The word *γράμμα*, incorrectly translated "letter," means "what is written," "the written Law," "the Jewish Law." St. Paul says that he was not a minister of that Law, but of "the Spirit," or, in other words, of the spiritual blessings to be received through Christ; "for the written Law causes death [that is, to such as adhere to it in opposition to Christianity], but the Spirit gives life." There is no reference to the distinction between the letter and the spirit of any particular writing.

‡ Galatians v. 19.

tively called the carnal sense, being compared to the body in man ; while the two branches of the allegorical, the moral and the mystical, or spiritual, were compared to the soul and to the spirit, according to the threefold division of man in ancient theology. "The history of the divine volumes," he says, "contains the works of the flesh, and is of little benefit to those who understand it as it is written." The examples of the Patriarchs, according to him, lead to dissoluteness, and the sacrifices of the Law to idolatry, if the history of the former and the injunctions concerning the latter are not supposed to have a further meaning than appears in the letter. "That the language of Scripture," he adds, "in its obvious sense, teaches hatred, is shown by this passage :— *Wretched daughter of Babylon! Blessed be he who shall requite thee as thou hast treated us. Blessed be he who shall take thy little ones and dash them against the stones ;* * and by this passage :— *In the morning, I slew all the sinners of the land.* † And there are others of a similar kind, expressive of contention, rivalry, anger, strife, dissension ; which vices the examples set before us in the history, if we do not look to their higher meaning, are more likely to produce than to re-

* Psalm cxxxvii. 8, 9.

† Psalm ci. 8.

strain. Heresies, likewise, owe their existence rather to understanding the Scriptures carnally [literally] than, as many think, to the works of the flesh."* The last sentence shows the liberality of Origen. From this, as well as from passages before cited,† we perceive what he thought the main occasion of the heresy of the Gnostics, and consequently what he regarded as its essential characteristic, that is to say, their doctrine concerning the Jewish dispensation. All the passages quoted from him prove, likewise, that he agreed with the Gnostics in regarding the opinions of the Jews respecting their Scriptures as untenable, if these Scriptures were to be understood only in their obvious meaning. But, if the metaphor may be allowed, he thought that their difficulties were to be solved in the menstruum of allegorical interpretation, and that the essential meaning might thus be obtained in crystalline purity.

AMONG the Gnostics, Marcion, as I have said, rejected the allegorical mode of interpretation. Other Gnostics, particularly the Valentinians,

* Ex decimo Stromatum Origen. Lib. (Apud Hieronymi Comment. in Ep. ad Galat. Opp. IV. P. 1. coll. 294, 295.) Origenis Opp. Tom. I. p. 41.

† See pp. 242 - 244.

allegorized at least as extravagantly as the fathers ; but they were not disposed, like them, thus to do away the difficulties of the Jewish Scriptures. They, perhaps, felt more strongly the common dislike of the Gentiles to the Jews. They were not so ready to overcome the first unfavorable impressions which those books made upon their minds. Their faith as Christians was more imperfect ; it was more implicated with their philosophical speculations ; and they were not as solicitous as the catholic Christians to receive all which they supposed to be taught or implied in the New Testament. Their hypothesis respecting the Jewish dispensation, that it proceeded from an inferior divinity, was equally in accordance with the notions of the times, as the supposition that the books of the Jews were to be interpreted allegorically. By their theory, — by admitting the existence and acts of the God of the Jews, but denying him to be the Supreme Being, — they accounted, as they believed, for the otherwise inexplicable phenomena which those books presented ; while the catholic Christians thought themselves enabled to escape the force of the objections founded on those phenomena, by the allegorical mode of interpretation, and the other expedients to which they had recourse.

It may appear, then, that the principal occasion of the existence of the Gnostics, that is, of proper Christian Gnostics, was the impossibility, as it seemed to them, of regarding the God of the Old Testament and the God of Christians as the same being. It is true that their systems, as we shall see, were intended to give an account of the evil in the world. But in having this object in view they did not differ from the catholic Christians, nor from heathen philosophers. What characterizes them is their regarding the Jewish dispensation as an essential part of the evil and imperfection to be accounted for, and the character and agency which they consequently assigned in their systems to the God of the Jews. They were constituted a peculiar class by being Christians who separated Judaism from Christianity. In the controversy with their catholic opponents, the strength of their cause evidently lay in their objections to the Old Testament. These they appear to have been most ready to bring forward in defending their systems. In them they had a vantage-ground above their opponents, and could become assailants in their turn. Such was the state of opinion and feeling in the early age when the Gnostics were most numerous and respectable, that we might reasonably suppose that a consid-

erable number of individuals would embrace Christianity with more or less imperfect faith, who would not extend their belief so far as to acknowledge Judaism also as a dispensation from God.

The belief of the catholic Christians in the divine origin of Judaism was a genuine consequence of their Christian faith. But with this belief, as if the one thing were necessarily connected with the other, they went on to adopt, likewise, the opinions of the Jews concerning the divine authority of the books of the Old Testament. Those opinions were not, indeed, at once received by all Christians not Gnostics, as we have seen in the case of the author of the Clementine Homilies; but they soon obtained general reception. The belief of the divine authority of the Jewish books was even extended by the catholic Christians to embrace most of those which constitute the Apocrypha of our modern Bibles.

THERE are few phenomena in the history of opinions more remarkable than this reception of the Jewish notions concerning the Old Testament by the generality of the early Christians. The Jews had been regarded with aversion by other nations. The unbelieving Jews continued

to be so by the Gentile Christians ; and the believing Jews were an heretical sect in little repute. The books of the Old Testament, though accessible to every Greek and Roman scholar through the medium of the Greek translation of them, the Septuagint, had heretofore been treated with contemptuous neglect. The Gentile Christians, by whom they were received as of divine authority, were, with very few exceptions, wholly unacquainted with their original language, and obliged to recur for its meaning to copies of the Septuagint or of other translations, the correctness of which was denied by their opponents, the unbelieving Jews. At the same time, they had a strong feeling of the objections to which the Pentateuch and other parts of the Old Testament are exposed, if understood in their obvious meaning, or, as they expressed it, in their *literal* sense ; and, notwithstanding the allegorical mode of interpretation, and the other expedients by which they escaped from these difficulties, they were reduced to straits, both in reconciling many passages to their own reason and moral sentiments, and in defending them against the attacks of Gnostics and unbelievers. Still they encumbered their cause, and gave great advantage to their opponents, by asserting the Jewish opinions concerning the char-

acter of those books, in consequence of the belief that the truth of Christianity implied, not merely the fact of the divine mission of Moses, but the truth of those Jewish opinions. The scholars and philosophers, — for scholars and philosophers they were, notwithstanding any modern prejudices to the contrary, — who during the first three centuries appear as Christian fathers, received from the Jews, with whom as a people they had no friendly intercourse, all their canonical books; regarding them as of divine origin, and ascribing to them equal authority with the records of Christianity. It must have been a powerfully operative cause which produced this result. It strikingly evinces the strength of evidence that accompanied our religion. Its proofs must have been overwhelming, when, in addition to establishing an invincible faith in the religion itself, they occasioned, notwithstanding such obstacles, the adoption of the Jewish opinions respecting the Old Testament.

THE fundamental difference, then, between the Gnostics and the catholic Christians consisted in their different views of Judaism, and of the author of the Jewish dispensation. But, like other speculatists of their day, the Gnostics

formed for themselves a system of the universe, in which, answerably to the declarations of the Old Testament, he whom they regarded as the god of the Jews appears as the Creator of the physical world. Such a system necessarily embraced some solution, or rather some account, of the evil that exists ; and this, as we shall next see, was partly found in the supposed character of the Creator, and partly in the evil nature ascribed to matter.

THE topics treated of in this Chapter naturally suggest the inquiry, — In what manner should the Jewish dispensation and the books of the Old Testament be regarded? The views that have been given of the opinions of the early Christians, both Catholics and Gnostics, involve the whole subject in doubts and difficulties, of which no rational solution is afforded. But the Jewish is intimately connected with the Christian dispensation, and one may, therefore, reasonably be unwilling to dismiss the inquiry without some attempt to answer it. I have accordingly considered the subject in an Additional Note to this volume.*

* See Additional Note, D.

ADDITIONAL NOTES.

ADDITIONAL NOTES.

NOTE A.

(See p. 67.)

ON THE STATUE WHICH IS SAID BY JUSTIN MARTYR, AND OTHERS, TO HAVE BEEN ERECTED AT ROME TO SIMON MAGUS.

I HAVE observed, on the page referred to above, that "Justin says there was at Rome a statue dedicated to Simon as a god." By thus quoting him I have implied that I regard his account, *so far as it relates to the existence of the statue*, as probably true. It is confirmed by the notices of a series of subsequent Christian writers. But it has been discredited by the generality of the learned among Protestants in modern times. Whether or not his testimony to the existence of the statue be true becomes, therefore, a question of considerable curiosity, involving several others in its decision. These are, — Whether Justin and the other Christian writers, who for more than two centuries after his death speak of the statue, are to be condemned for gross negligence and credulity ? — or, Whether a great majority of modern scholars among Protestants, including some of the most learned and judicious, have unreasonably rejected the account ? — and still another, more general in its char-

acter, which may be thus explained. As far as relates to the present subject, it would be idle to discriminate the Christian from the Pagan writers of antiquity. In both we may find errors of fact in abundance, occasioned, in great part, by the very imperfect means of information in ancient times. But the present inquiry relates to a public object of sight, the existence or non-existence of which must, for several years at least (we know not how long), have been capable of being ascertained by any inhabitant or visiter of the principal city of the ancient world; and the question, therefore, arises, Whether, in relation to such an object, the uncontradicted testimony of a series of ancient writers for more than two centuries may be rejected as fabulous?

Justin's account of this statue is to be found in his First Apology, where it is twice mentioned. He says, —

“After the return of Christ to heaven, the demons put forward certain men, calling themselves gods; who not only were not persecuted, but were honored by you. Such was Simon, a certain Samaritan, who, during the reign of Claudius Cæsar, having performed magical works, through the art and power of demons, in your imperial city of Rome, was accounted a god, and has been honored by you with a statue as a god, which statue has been erected on the island in the Tiber, between the two bridges, with this inscription in Latin, *Simoni Deo Sancto*; and almost all the Samaritans, and a few also among other nations, acknowledge and worship him as the First God.” *

He thus recurs to the subject: —

“As I have before said, Simon being with you in the imperial city of Rome, during the reign of Claudius Cæsar, he so astonished and deluded the sacred Senate and the Ro-

* I. Apologia, pp. 38 – 40.

man people, as to be accounted a god, and to be honored with a statue, as the other gods are honored by you. Whence I beg that you [the Emperor, or the Emperor and the Cæsars] would make the sacred Senate and your people acquainted with this our supplication; so that, if any one be entangled in his doctrines, he may learn the truth, and be able to escape from error. And, if it be your pleasure, let the statue be destroyed." *

Respecting these passages, it is, in the first place, to be observed, that there are two quite distinct points to which Justin's statements relate. On the one hand, he testifies to the existence of the statue in his own day; on the other, he gives an account of the circumstances which he believed to have attended its erection, an event which he supposed to have occurred about a century before he wrote. Whatever mistake he may have committed respecting the circumstances attending its erection does not tend in any degree to invalidate his testimony to its existence. Considering the frequency of great errors concerning historical facts in ancient authors, it would be nothing remarkable if Justin should have given a wrong account of the dedication of the statue. But if there were no statue to Simon at Rome in the place which he specifies, his blunder (for the supposition of falsehood is wholly out of the question) must be regarded as very extraordinary.

The account of Justin has been canvassed as if he had asserted, in the passage last quoted, that the Romans had enrolled Simon among their national gods by a public act of the state. But it is evident, to say the least, that he does not assert this in express words. What he does say is, that Simon produced such an effect at Rome, so deluded both

* I. Apologia, p. 84.

high and low, the sacred Senate and the common people, that in consequence he was honored with a statue as a god; but by whom this statue was erected he does not say. If it had been by a public act, it must have been by a decree of the Senate, at the proposal, or at least with the concurrence, of the Emperor. It must have been virtually an act of the Emperor. But the Emperor is not referred to by Justin as concerned in the honors paid to Simon. Justin does, however, speak of the effect which that impostor produced on the people (in connection with the Senate), as preparing the way for them. But the people could have taken no part in any public act for the deification of Simon; as, before the time of Claudius, that is, since the reign of Tiberius, they had not had even a nominal share in the government.

But there was a decree of Claudius which may, perhaps, serve to explain the passage in Justin, and more particularly some later accounts of the dedication of the statue. Dion Cassius relates, that, in the time of Claudius, Rome was filled with effigies, there having been no restriction to prevent any one from putting up his own picture or statue; but that the Emperor "removed the most of them, and forbade private persons thus to put up their effigies without obtaining permission from the Senate, unless they were erecting or repairing some building; for, in that case, he gave permission to them and their relations to set up their effigies in such places."* Though this edict, as reported by Dion,

* Dion. Hist. Rom. in Claudio. Lib. LX. § 25. p. 962. Ed. Reimari. — The passage is quoted by Van Dale in his dissertation "De Statuâ Simonis Mago erectâ," published in his work "De Oraculis Veterum Ethnicorum" (p. 589. Ed. secund.). It is quoted by him in proof that the numerous statues with which Rome was crowded were statues of men, not of gods; and he does not appear to have observed

merely prohibits (except in a particular case) the setting up of one's own effigy without the sanction of public authority, yet it cannot be supposed that this sanction was not equally necessary for such as wished to set up the effigy of another. The reason given for the decree was equally applicable to the one case as the other; and had private persons been allowed to set up effigies of whomever they would, except their own, it is evident that the decree would have been nugatory from the ease with which it might be evaded. It follows, therefore, that those who set up the statue to Simon, if it were erected after this decree, must have obtained the permission of the Senate, and consequently the sanction of the Emperor. This may serve to explain the language of Justin, so far as it implies a public assent to its being set up; and still more to account for that of Irenæus, who says, that "Simon was, as it is reported, honored with a statue by Claudius Cæsar on account of his magical powers";* and that of Cyril of Jerusalem (in the fourth century), who says, that "Simon so deceived the citizens of Rome, that Claudius erected his statue" with the inscription mentioned by Justin.†

But it is a matter of little interest how far Justin was correct in the vague account given by him of the circumstances attending the erection of the statue, which it is not probable he could have learned except from oral tradition. Nor is any one called upon to defend the later report, that it was erected by Claudius, the origin of which, as has just

that it had any other bearing on the question. — Van Dale is commonly referred to as having most fully stated the objections to Justin's account.

* *Cont. Hæres. Lib. I. c. 23. § 1. p. 99.*

† *Catæchesis VI. § 9. Opp. p. 89. Ed. Milles.*

been suggested, may not improbably be found in the circumstance, that his sanction was necessary to its erection. The only question of importance is, Whether Justin affirmed, with such particularity and earnestness, the existence of a statue which did not exist, and led a series of writers into the same error, an error which, as we shall see, remained uncontradicted by their opponents?

The credit of Justin's account was first shaken by the discovery, in the year 1574, on the island in the Tiber, the place mentioned by him, of a stone which had been apparently the base of a small statue, with an inscription to Semo Sancus, an ancient Sabine god.* It was concluded that Justin had mistaken the inscription to Semo Sancus for one to Simon. As a specimen of the manner in which he has since been treated by the coarser class of critics, I may quote what is said by Middleton, a writer of much celebrity in his day.

Justin, "in his Apology, addressed to the Emperor and Senate of Rome, charges them with paying divine honors to the heretic and impostor, Simon, of Samaria, commonly called the Magician; and for the truth of his charge appeals to a statue, then subsisting in Rome, and publicly dedicated to that Simon in the Island of the Tiber, with this inscription, *Simoni Deo Sancto*. But it is manifest beyond all reasonable doubt, as some learned men have shown, that Justin was led here into a gross blunder, by his usual want of judgment and knowledge of Roman affairs, and his preconceived belief of certain fabulous stories which passed current about this Simon among the first Christians; for the

* This discovery is mentioned, and an account of the stone is given, by Baronius, in his *Annals*, under the year of Christ 44. § lv. Tom. I. p. 328. Ed. 1610.

statue and inscription to which he appeals were not dedicated to his countryman, Simon Magus, of whose deification there is not the least hint in any Roman writer, but to a Sabine Deity, of ancient worship in Rome, and of similar name, *Semoni Sanco*, frequently mentioned by the old writers, as the inscription itself, dug up about two centuries ago from the ruins of that very place, or little island, which Justin describes, has clearly demonstrated." *

Middleton regards the finding, or rather the existence, of this inscription, as affording *clear demonstration* that Justin committed a *gross blunder*. On the contrary, this fact alone

* Middleton's "Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers," &c. pp. 40, 41. — Middleton in this work attacks the fathers as he might have done contemporaries with whom he was engaged in an angry controversy. He confounds together those of all times and of all characters. He had no sympathy with the virtues of the early Christians, and shows no capacity of estimating men living under influences different from those acting on himself. He judges of the writings of the fathers, as if they had been the writings of persons within the circle of his acquaintance. From the erroneous standard which he thus sets up, and from the spirit in which he carries on the controversy, his book, so far as their characters are concerned, is a misrepresentation throughout. But besides the false light under which every thing is exhibited, there is often in his statements an unscholarlike looseness of assertion, by which alone they are accommodated to his purpose. Thus, in proof of Justin's weakness of mind, he alleges the fact, that he was a believer in the millennial reign of Christ on earth. (p. 31.) This is true; and it is also true that an unprejudiced man of sense, conversant with the history of opinions, would hardly think of mentioning it as an item toward forming a judgment of Justin's character. But Middleton adds, that Justin believed that "*the saints should reign with Christ in Jerusalem, in the enjoyment of all sensual pleasures.*" This is not true; nor is there any foundation for the assertion; though Middleton pretends to quote, in a translation, the words of Justin, and in a note gives the beginning of the passage to which he refers, breaking off with an "&c."

affords no ground for supposing him to be in error. That it casts no discredit on his account will appear at once, if we consider that there would be no improbability in the account of an ancient writer, who, in enumerating the statues on the island in the Tiber, should mention one to Semo Sancus, and another to Simon. Justin says that there was on the island a statue to Simon Magus; it appears that there was one to Semo Sancus. There is no incongruity between the two facts; nor does the latter tend in any degree to create a presumption against the former. In one case only can the existence of the inscription to Semo Sancus have any bearing on the question. If the account of Justin, so far as it relates simply to the existence of the statue to Simon, be in itself improbable, then the existence of the inscription to Semo Sancus may serve to strengthen our doubts, so far as it may furnish a probable explanation of Justin's supposed mistake. We will, therefore, consider whether it could in any case furnish such an explanation.

Justin says the inscription of the statue of which he speaks was

SIMONI DEO SANCTO.

The inscription found, omitting the titles of the individual by whom it was set up, runs thus: * —

SEMONI

SANCO

DEO. FIDIO

SACRUM

SEX. POMPEIUS. SP. F.

* * * * *

DONUM. DEDIT.

* Gruteri Thesaurus Inscriptionum, Tom. I. p. xcvi. n. 5.

Upon this, it may first be observed, that, if we suppose Justin to affirm that the statue of which he speaks was erected by public authority, he could not have referred to the statue of Semo Sancus, with its inscription, by which it appears that it was set up by an individual. The mistake supposed could not have been committed, unless the inscription had been read; and no one who had read the inscription could commit the mistake. It is, therefore, unnecessary to observe further, that the stone on which the inscription is found is so small, that it could have served only for the support of a statue below the size of life. But the statues set up by public authority were either of the size of life or colossal. Besides, if Simon had been enrolled among the gods by a public act, a temple, an altar, and priests would have been dedicated to his service. And of all these particulars Justin cannot reasonably be supposed to have been ignorant. One of two things, therefore, appears evident. Either the statue of Semo Sancus was not the statue referred to by Justin, or Justin did not mean to assert that the statue of which he spoke was erected by public authority. One position or the other, it would seem, must be abandoned.

Let it be supposed, then, that Justin did not believe the statue of which he spoke to have been erected by public authority. In this case, if it be said that he mistook the inscription to Sancus for one to Simon, the first improbability that strikes us, and it may seem sufficient to settle the question, is the improbability that he, or any one else, should have read so carelessly as to think that the words *Semoni Sancto Deo* with *Fidio* following *Deo*, in immediate connection with it, were the words *Simoni Deo Sancto* without *Fidio* following, which could not be connected with them, as being a name appropriate to Sancus.

The unlikelihood of this mistake is aggravated by the circumstance, that three other inscriptions to Sancus have been found,* and that probably there were still more at Rome; for he was an ancient and well-known god, to whom, as we learn from Ovid, a temple was dedicated in that city on the Quirinal hill.† He is mentioned not only by Ovid, but by Livy,‡ the elder Pliny,§ and other Latin writers, and by Dionysius of Halicarnassus,|| and Plutarch.¶ If, therefore, we suppose that Justin, out of the number of inscriptions to Sancus, mistook one for an inscription to Simon Magus, we are compelled to ascribe to him a degree of ignorance which the circumstances of his life, his character, and writings render all but incredible. We must also suppose, that his Apology, a writing in which the whole body of Christians was interested, was seen, before its presentation, by no friend capable of correcting his error.

But the previous improbability that Justin would commit the mistake supposed is not the only reason for believing that he did not commit it. Circumstances subsequent to the presentation of his Apology afford proof equally strong. Justin's supposed mistake has been called a "gross" and "ridiculous" blunder. Epithets at least as harsh must have been applied to it in his own day by the opponents of his faith, and by his personal enemies, through whose hatred, at a subsequent period, he was expecting to be sum-

* They are given by Gruter, in connection with that before quoted.

† Ovidii Fast. Lib. VI. vv. 213-218.

‡ Hist. Lib. VIII. c. 20. Lib. XXXII. c. 1.

§ Hist. Nat. Lib. VIII. c. 74.

|| Antiq. Roman. Lib. II. § 49. p. 109. Lib. IV. § 58. p. 246. Ed. Hudson.

¶ Questiones Romanæ, n. xxx.

moned, as he shortly after was summoned, to martyrdom.* It would be idle to suppose that his *Apology* was not read by them. The Christians were a spreading, obnoxious, and persecuted sect. They had become an object of attention to the Emperors. They were looked upon by the generality with religious horror and aversion. They were the most extraordinary class of men in the Empire, distinguished from all others by very remarkable characteristics. And the *Apology* of Justin, formally presented to the Emperor and the Senate, was a public protest by one of the most eminent of their number, probably with the concurrence of many others, against the feelings with which they were regarded, and the manner in which they had been treated. It claimed to be an exposition and vindication of their doctrines and morals. It is impossible to doubt that such a composition must have been read by many who would read it with no friendly feelings. But in this work Justin put forward in a most conspicuous manner, as we have seen, his allegation of the fact, that a statue dedicated to Simon, as a god, existed in a particular place at Rome. He earnestly solicited attention to his notice of it. Had he committed the extraordinary blunder supposed, it would have been immediately seized upon as an object of ridicule, and employed to destroy the effect of all else he had said. It would have been exposed and scouted as soon as it appeared. The mention of the statue would have been omitted in all subsequent copies of his *Apology*; and neither Justin himself, nor any Christian writer following him, would have referred to it; except, perhaps, to apologize for the error.

But there is not the least trace, that the account of Jus-

* II. *Apologia*, p. 190.

tin was either ridiculed or questioned in ancient times. Some years after the publication of his Apology, Justin was so little aware of having exposed himself to derision, that he referred to the passages relating to Simon only with self-gratulation, as evidence of his own fearlessness in the cause of Christianity, since he had not been restrained from writing them through dread of the followers of Simon among his own countrymen, the Samaritans.* Half a century after Justin wrote, Tertullian, in another defence of Christians, distinguished by its vigor of thought and expression, took notice of the fact which his predecessor had brought forward. He says, addressing the Heathens with contemptuous irony:—"Your ancient gods may be pleased with your deifying your emperors, and congratulate themselves upon having their masters made their equals. But when you adore *Laurentina*, a public prostitute, (would at least that it were *Laïs* or *Phryne*!) together with *Juno*, *Ceres*, and *Diana*; when you consecrate *Simon Magus* with a statue and an inscription, 'To a holy god'; when you enroll some unknown boy of the court† in the divine synod, though the old gods were not of a nobler race, yet they may think themselves treated with indignity by you in admitting others to those honors which they alone had anciently received."‡ It would be an absurdity to imagine that Tertullian was here guilty of exposing himself to scorn by repeating as a falsehood what, when first uttered as a blunder, had brought shame on his predecessor and the Christian community. If he did not speak of the existence of the statue to Simon from his personal knowledge, which he well may have done, yet it is clear that he had never heard that the account of its existence had been exploded.

* *Dial. cum Tryph.* p. 397.

† The reference is to *Antinodis*.

‡ *Apologet.* c. 13. p. 14.

The account of Justin is quoted at length by Eusebius * without any expression of distrust ; and the statue to Simon is, as I have said, referred to by Christian writers for more than two centuries, the last whom it is worth while to mention being Theodoret.† We find in some of them the error, as I doubt not it is, of ascribing its erection to the Emperor Claudius, as his proper act. In the fifth century the story was told with some variations. An addition, probable enough in itself, but for which, perhaps, there was no sufficient authority, is made by Theodoret, who says that the statue was of brass ; and Augustine, whose correctness in the statement of facts is, in general, not to be trusted, speaks of a statue at Rome to Helena in connection with that to Simon ; ‡ an error probably founded on the account of Irenæus, that the Simonians worshipped statues both of Simon and Helena. We do not know that any of these writers were eyewitnesses to the existence of the statue. We do not know how long after the time of Justin it remained standing. But neither their want of personal knowledge, nor their variations nor mistakes in speaking of the statue, have any bearing on the argument for which their mention of it is adduced. This argument is, that a series of Christian writers would not have continued to repeat a story founded on a gross blunder, which they could not but know had afforded, and, whenever repeated, must continue to afford, occasion of triumph to their heathen opponents.

It would seem, then, that the solution of Justin's imagined error, by the supposition that he mistook a statue of Semo Sancus for one of Simon Magus, can hardly be admitted as

* Hist. Eccles. Lib. II. c. 13.

† Hæret. Fab. Lib. I. n. 1. Opp. IV. 191, 192.

‡ Catalog. Hæres. Opp. VI. 14.

plausible ; and it further appears, that there must be some very great intrinsic objection to his account, to balance the weighty improbabilities connected with the supposition of its not being true. I speak of his account of the existence of the statue. He may have been misunderstood, or he may have been in error, about the circumstances attending its erection. Whatever mistake he, or any other writer, may have committed in this respect may be easily paralleled. But, considering all the circumstances of the case, it would be hard to parallel the supposed mistake concerning its existence.

In regard to the fact of its existence, with which alone we are concerned, there is no difficulty in believing it to have been erected by some of Simon's followers at Rome. They worshipped in private statues of Simon and Helena. Nothing appears to render it improbable that they might have obtained leave, if that, as I suppose, were necessary, to set up a statue to him at Rome exposed to public view. The deification of contemporaries after death was common in that age, so that, as Juvenal says, the increased number of the gods overburdened unhappy Atlas with their weight.* The examples of it in the apotheoses of the Roman emperors, and of those to whom they extended the honor, are familiar to every one. There is a more affecting illustration of the common conceptions respecting it in the intention of Cicero to deify his beloved daughter Tullia, and to erect a temple to her memory.† We have already observed a case parallel to the public deification of Simon by his

* Sat. XIII. vv. 46-49.

† See his letters relating to the subject in the 12th book of his Letters to Atticus, and the fragment of his treatise *de Consolatione*, preserved by Lactantius, Institut. Lib. I. § 15.

followers, in the divine honors paid by the Cephallenians to Epiphanes.* Similar honors are said to have been rendered at Parium, to Alexander the Paphlagonian, and to Peregrinus Proteus, impostors of the same class with Simon; and at Troas to a certain Neryllinus, of whom we know nothing except that he was probably of like character.† The more noted charlatan, Apollonius of Tyana, was also regarded as a god, and thought worthy of having temples built for his worship.‡ But it may seem unnecessary to adduce these facts, since there is no reasonable question that Simon was adored as a god, or as God, by his followers, and therefore no reason to doubt that they might have erected a statue to him with the inscription reported.

It would seem, then, that there is nothing intrinsically improbable in the statement of Justin respecting the existence of the statue to Simon, and that the discovery of the inscription to Semo Sancus does not serve to invalidate it; but that, on the other hand, the gravest improbabilities attend the supposition that his statement is not true.

BUT, if this be so, a question arises, well deserving consideration, how it has happened that Justin's statement, confirmed by a series of subsequent writers, has been rejected almost unanimously, and often contemptuously, by Protestant scholars.

The immediate occasion of its being thus rejected has

* See before, p. 196.

† Athenagoræ Legat. pro Christ. § 26. p. 304. Ed. Marani.

‡ Philostratus de Vita Apollonii. Lib. I. c. 5. p. 6. Lib. VIII. c. 29. p. 369. Ed. Olearii. — Dion. Cass. Hist. Roman. in Caracalla. Lib. LXXVII. § 18. p. 1304. Ed. Reimari. — Vopiscus in Aurelian. c. 24.

undoubtedly been, the confounding together of Justin's testimony to the existence of the statue with his account of the circumstances attending its erection, and the mistake (as it seems to be), that this account implies that Simon was deified, and honored with a statue, by the Emperor and Senate, — not with their permission, but by an act originating from them. But, as we have seen, Justin's history of its erection, and his testimony to its existence, are two things entirely distinct; so that concerning the former he may have been altogether in error, while as respects the latter a mistake appears hardly credible.

The ultimate cause, then, of what may seem the hasty and indiscriminate manner in which his whole account has been rejected, is, perhaps, to be found in the prejudices and unjust judgments that have existed concerning the fathers. Under this common name have been comprehended Christian writers who lived during five centuries,* men the most diverse from each other in intellect, learning, and morals, of contrary opinions, and placed in circumstances the most unlike; some of them eminent for the highest and most difficult virtues; some propelled to gross errors of speculation and conduct by the misdirected force of religious principle in combination with their temper and passions; and some deformed by vices, — bigotry, hypocrisy, falsehood, a spirit of persecution, and greediness for power. But, in consequence of their all bearing the same name, which simply denotes them as ancient Christian writers on religious faith and practice, they have been regarded as forming a class of men so distinguished by essential characteristics, in which they resembled each other, that they all approxi-

* From the second to the sixth. The name is often still further extended to comprehend Christian writers till the twelfth century.

mated to a common standard of morals, intellect, and belief. Hence the incapacity, ignorance, errors, and vices of individuals have been brought forward, directly or indirectly, as chargeable on all those who shared with them the same generic name, or, in other words, were uninspired Christian writers during the first six centuries. It would be as reasonable to class the heathen philosophers together as a body having a common character, and to make Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, responsible for the morals of Aristippus, the reasonings of Pyrrho, the brutalities of the Cynics, or the gross vices by which so many others of their number were disgraced.

The tendency to depreciate the fathers commenced with the Reformation. Regarding them as a common body, the Romish church found in their writings, that is, in some of their writings, a support for its errors. It appealed to their authority; and this authority, with little discrimination between one writer and another, the Protestants were disposed to invalidate. The tendency among Protestants to form a low estimate of the fathers was further strengthened by the fact, that the peculiar doctrines of Luther and Calvin, and their followers, respecting the moral nature of man and the agency of God, were in strong opposition to those of the more respectable and able Christian writers of antiquity, and, in fact, to the general doctrine of Christians before the time of Augustine. Such being the state of feeling among the Protestants, it is also to be remarked, that the fathers of the first three centuries,* the *earlier* fathers, as I have called

* Or, to speak more precisely, the fathers of the second and third centuries; there being no Christian writer of the first century, real or supposed, to whom the name "father," standing alone, without the epithet "Apostolical," is commonly applied. Among the fathers of

them, those incomparably of the most interest from their circumstances and from their character, were regarded with but little favor by the Romish church, as affording little or no countenance to its abuses. Tertullian and Origen were not among its saints; nor was another writer deserving to be classed with them, Lactantius; and with regard to others, the most eminent of those times, as Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria, it is contended by the scholars of that church, that much in their writings is to be excused only by a consideration of the crude and yet unformed conceptions of religious doctrines which existed in their time.*

the third century I reckon Arnobius and Lactantius, whose lives were principally passed during that century, though the works by which they are now known did not appear till after the commencement of the fourth. The *essential* distinction intended is between those fathers who lived and wrote while Christianity was a persecuted religion, and those who became conspicuous when it had ceased to be so. The persecution commenced by Diocletian, which raged so terribly for a time, began in the year 303; but that persecution and the sufferings of Christians for their religion were finally terminated by the edict of Constantine and Licinius, issued in the year 313.

* The very false judgment which has prevailed in the Roman Catholic Church concerning the relative worth of the *earlier* and *later* fathers, of those who lived before and those who lived after the establishment of Christianity as the religion of the Empire, cannot, perhaps, be better illustrated than by a few words of one of the most learned, intelligent, and liberal-minded of its theologians, Du Pin. In his "*Bibliothèque des Auteurs Ecclésiastiques*," when he comes to treat of those of the fourth century, he says (in his "*Avertissement au Lecteur*"),—"It is not necessary here to speak in praise of the ecclesiastical authors of the fourth century. The public is sufficiently prepossessed in their favor. Their names are more known than those of the authors of the first three centuries, and their reputation is better established. They are held in greater esteem; and a higher idea is entertained of their knowledge and their merit. It

The credit of the fathers was shaken by the Reformation. But other causes have since powerfully operated to produce in many a feeling of indiscriminate disrespect towards them. Many of the errors respecting Christianity that existed before the Reformation remained among Protestants. These errors were traditionary. They were to be found, or their rudiments at least were to be found in ancient times, in the theology of some of the fathers, particularly the later fathers. It followed, therefore, when the attention of Protestants was more directed to the controversies among themselves than to the contest with the Romish church, that the defenders of those errors appealed to the fathers anew, and again asserted their authority. They were brought forward as expounders of religion entitled to the highest deference ; and, with all the ignorance and all

must in truth be confessed, that, as the Church was never more flourishing than in this century, so it never had more illustrious, more able, and more eloquent writers."

On the contrary, the more eminent fathers of the first three centuries, whom (with the exception of Lactantius) I have so often had occasion to mention, are of great interest, because in their works we may trace the development of our religion in the hearts and lives of men whom it had withdrawn from the Pagan world. The works of those of after times are to be read principally to trace the development of its corruptions. But it is not strange that a church which has embodied and sanctified those corruptions should prefer the latter to the former.

The eloquence of the heart and the intellect is to be found in the earlier fathers, the eloquence of men of uncommon minds and strong feelings struggling in a cause for which they were prepared to suffer and to die. There is no eloquence of the fathers of later date to be compared with that of Tertullian or Lactantius. There is none of their number who rivalled Clement of Alexandria in learning ; and still less is there any one who presents a character so blameless and estimable as that of Origen.

the intellectual defects that belonged to them, as belonging to their age, they were opposed to the learning and acuteness of the most enlightened of modern times. Hence the attention of some of the ablest scholars was directed particularly to their errors and defects, as affording proof that they had no claim to the deference which was so injudiciously demanded for them. The want of wisdom which had placed them in so disadvantageous a position was exposed by showing how ill qualified they were to occupy it. A prejudice was thus raised against the ancient Christian writers as a body ; and great injustice has been done to the fathers generally, but especially to the earlier and more excellent of their number. Being ancients, they have been estimated as if they were contemporaries. They have been exhibited in relations altogether different from those in which they actually stood, and placed under a point of view from which they ought never to have been regarded. In consequence, their character and writings have been directly, as well as indirectly, misrepresented. The prejudice against them has been readily adopted by the superficial and ignorant, who are ever disposed to triumph over the great men of other times on account of their wanting the knowledge and the intellectual advantages belonging to the age in which they themselves live. To the fate of the early Christian writers of real eminence for their talents and virtues we may find a parallel in that of Aristotle, who was, perhaps, the most penetrating and profound of Grecian philosophers, but whose foolish admirers opposed his authority to the progress of science, till his name almost became a byword of ridicule.

If, then, the view we have taken of the accounts of Justin, and of other fathers, respecting the statue of Simon

THE STATUE OF SIMON MAGUS. xxiii

Magus be correct, the unqualified rejection of them by a great majority of Protestant scholars may, perhaps, be ascribed mainly to the operation of that prejudice of which I have spoken ; and, if so, it affords a remarkable exemplification of it.

NOTE B.

(See pp. 70, 248.)

ON THE CLEMENTINE HOMILIES.

THE fictitious narrative contained in the Clementine Homilies* exists in two principal forms, one of which bears that title, and the other is called the Recognitions of Clement. The title of the Recognition of Clement (in the singular)† seems anciently to have been common to both. The Homilies have been published by Cotelier, in his edition of the *Patres Apostolici*, from a single manuscript, in which the latter part of the work is wanting. There are three different abridgments of the Homilies extant in manuscript, of which Cotelier has published one. The Recognitions have come down to us only in a Latin translation by Rufinus,‡ who, generally an unfaithful translator, professes, in regard to this particular book, to have omitted certain passages “concerning the unoriginated God and the originated (*de ingenito Deo genitoque*),§ and some

* I do not think it worth while to change the modern title, but the Greek word *Ὁμιλίας* should have been rendered “Discourses.” It refers to the conversations and discussions with which the work is filled.

† *Ὁ Ἀναγνωρισμὸς Κλήμεντος*. The title of “The Circuits of Peter,” *Αἱ Περιόδοι Πέτρου*, appears also to have been used concerning both forms of the narrative.

‡ This translation was made about the end of the fourth century.

§ The passage, or one of the passages, relating to this subject, is

other topics ; as these passages, to say nothing more of them, surpassed his comprehension." Rufinus mentions that there were two editions of the work of Clement, in some respects different from each other, but giving in great part the same narrative. He refers, probably, to the Homilies and the Recognitions.

Both these works contain a fictitious narrative, the hero of which relates his own history. He represents himself as a young man, a citizen of Rome, by the name of Clement. His mind, he tells us, had been long occupied and distressed by inquiries and doubts on the subject of religion. While in this state, he hears at Rome of the promulgation of Christianity. He seeks out the Apostle Peter, and becomes his associate and convert. During his intercourse with Peter, he informs him that he was of a noble family, but that he had been separated in his childhood first from his mother and his two elder brothers, and afterwards from his father. Of his father, who had left him for the purpose of seeking his mother and brothers, he had not heard for twenty years. But during his travels with Peter he meets and recognizes all his lost relatives. Hence the narrative was called the Recognition of Clement. A considerable part of each work is occupied by accounts of Simon Magus, who is supposed to have been, at the time of the story, the great opponent of Peter, and by the detail of public disputations in which Peter and his disciples are represented as having contended against him. In the Homilies, Simon appears much more than in the Recognitions. The doctrines ascribed to him are, in great part, Gnostic

preserved in some manuscripts as rendered by another translator, and is comprised in ten sections of the third book, as published by Cotelier, namely, from the second to the eleventh, inclusive.

doctrines. The discussion of them, therefore, throws some light on the opinions and reasoning of the Gnostics, and renders the work of a certain degree of value in studying their history.

Upon comparing the two works together, it becomes evident, I think, that the *Recognitions* are founded on, and are merely a refashioning of, the *Homilies*. The *Homilies* are a remarkable work, distinguished for freedom of speculation, and for the variety of opinions which the author brings forward, either to maintain or to confute. It is true, that his own opinions are often extravagant, and that in speculating freely he commonly speculates falsely, and discovers no remarkable ability in reasoning, even according to the standard of his age. But the activity of his mind, the occasional justness of his views, his command of language, and the extent of his information, show a somewhat cultivated understanding, engaged in philosophical studies. The work is the most curious exemplification that remains of what we may suppose to have been the effect of an imperfect acquaintance with Christianity on some thinking and discursive minds, in an early stage of its history. It gives a view of the excitement of thought, and of the mixture of truth and error, that might be expected in such minds, and of their freedom from some false opinions which afterwards became connected with our religion.

But, with the exception of the story, the striking characteristics of the *Homilies* disappear in the *Recognitions*. Large portions of the narrative are given almost verbally, and its outline is preserved with some variations. But the discourses of Peter, of Simon, and of others, which constitute the greater part of the work, are changed. Common-place matter, more conformed, we may suppose, to the opinions of the age when the *Recognitions* appeared, is sub-

stituted for what was doubtless regarded as the hazardous and erroneous teaching of the original author. In the discourses, however, given in the *Recognitions*, many suggestions and thoughts are borrowed from the *Homilies*, though often with a change of their original place and relation. The general impression from a comparison of the two works is, that, the *Homilies* being attractive from the narrative which they contained, as well as from their other characteristics, it was the design of the author of the *Recognitions* to supersede that work by introducing another, having the same narrative, intermixed in the same manner with various discourses, but free from at least the more obnoxious speculations of its predecessor. The design of the *Abridgment* of the *Homilies*, published by Cotelier, appears to have been similar; but in this little more than the original story is given, the discourses being omitted without much attempt to supply their place. This, or some other abridgment, seems in later times to have come into use, and to have been regarded with favor, being probably the work referred to by the unknown author of a tract called "*A Synopsis of Sacred Scripture*" * (of uncertain date), who says, as I understand him, that "what is true and important" in what he calls "*The Circuits of Peter*," that is, the *Clementine Homilies*, "has been selected from them and digested," and that this selection may be read; † and by the ecclesiastical historian, Nicephorus Callisti, in the fifteenth century, who speaks of what were in his day called "*The Clementines*" as well received by the Church. ‡

* Published with the works of Athanasius.

† Athanasii Opp. II. 202. Ed. Montfaucon.

‡ Hist. Eccles. Lib. III. c. 18,—as quoted by Cotelier.

Among other doctrines different from those which prevailed before the close of the second century, the author of the Homilies teaches, by putting his words into the mouth of Peter, that the Pentateuch was not written by Moses, and represents it as containing a great mixture of dangerous errors, especially false representations of God, the insertion of which is ascribed to Satan, during the period when the Law was preserved by tradition.* He believes this corruption of Scripture to have been permitted for the trial of men, and expresses himself concerning this subject with scarcely coherent extravagance. It was intended, according to him, to make evident the distinction between two classes of men; those, on the one hand, "who have the hardihood to lend a willing ear to what is written against God," and those, on the other, "who, through affection for him, not only disbelieve what is said against him, but would not even endure to listen to it, if it were true, esteeming it much safer to expose themselves to danger for a faith that honors him, than to live with an ill conscience through faith in blasphemous words."† In conformity with this, he denies the truth of the fall of Adam, of the drunkenness of Noah, and of the polygamy of Abraham and Jacob. He says that Moses was not a homicide, and did not learn how to judge the Israelites from the priest of an idol.‡ He maintains that Adam was a manifestation of Christ, affirming him to be the True

* Homil. II. § 38. See also the remainder of the second, and the third Homily, particularly Homil. III. § 47, and Homil. XVIII. §§ 19-22.

† Homil. II. § 38. Conf. Homil. III. § 10.

‡ Homil. II. § 52. — The author, in speaking of Moses, refers to the story of his killing an Egyptian, Exodus ii. 11, seqq.; and to that of his adopting the counsel of his father-in-law, Jethro, a priest of Midian, concerning judging the Israelites, Exod. xviii.

Prophet ("the True Prophet" being the title by which he commonly designates Christ); and thinks that one is not to be pardoned, even if, deceived by "spurious scripture," he should believe ill of the progenitor of all men.* So far is he from regarding the ritual law of the Jews as of divine origin, that he speaks with abhorrence of sacrifices, and expressly teaches that they never had been acceptable to God.† He seems to have had a bad opinion of Aaron, the Jewish prophets, and John the Baptist.‡ But, according to him, the teaching of Moses and Christ was the same; and the believer in either alone, if he kept God's laws, would be equally accepted by God; faith in either being required only as the ground of such obedience.§

His abhorrence of sacrifices, it may be observed, was connected with an equal abhorrence of the use of animal food. Giving a fabulous account of the introduction of the latter by the giants before the flood, he says, that, when brutes failed, men proceeded to eat human flesh; nor was it, he adds, a wide step to devour the flesh of their own kind, after having tasted that of other animals.|| This, and whatever else I have represented him as saying, it is to be recollected that he says under the person of St. Peter.

WHAT may next be remarked is, that the author appears to have had no design of representing his work as written by the Apostolical Father, Clement of Rome. It is a fictitious autobiography, in which the name of Clement is given to the supposed writer, who is also described as a native of

* Homil. III. §§ 17-21.

† Ibid. § 45. Conf. § 26.

‡ Homil. II. §§ 15-17, 23. Homil. III. §§ 11-28.

§ Homil. VIII. §§ 5-7.

|| Ibid. § 16.

Rome. He might, therefore, be called Clement of Rome; and this coincidence alone seems to have given occasion, in the fourth century, to the belief that the author was the Apostolical Father; a belief which involved the absurdity of supposing that an evident fiction was true history.* But the work itself does not claim to be his production, and, in fact, affords no reasonable ground for the mistake; and is, therefore, not to be regarded as supposititious. Its true author is wholly unknown. It has been conjectured that he was a Jewish Christian. But he does not discover the narrow prejudices which characterized the generality of the Ebionites, nor do his doctrines, feelings, use of language, or general cast of mind, appear to mark him as a Jewish Christian of more liberal views. A Jewish author would hardly have written under the assumed character of a Gentile, as Clement is represented to have been.† Perhaps the

* This error appears to have led to, and to have been afterwards countenanced by, the fabrication of an epistle, professedly from the supposed author, Clement, to St. James, at Jerusalem, which is now prefixed to the work. In this epistle Clement is made to speak of himself as having been ordained bishop of Rome by Peter, and thus to identify himself with the Apostolical Father. But there can be little question that this epistle is not the work of the author of the Homilies.

† The principal ground on which the writer of the Clementine Homilies has, in modern times, been regarded as a Jewish Christian, and particularly as an Ebionite, may be thus stated. Before Epiphanius, as I have already had occasion to remark, the heretical Jewish Christians had in common been denominated by the name of Ebionites alone. But he divides them into two principal classes, the Nazarenes and the Ebionites (Hæres. XXIIX, XXX.). He then distinguishes between the earlier and the later Ebionites (Hæres. XXX. Opp. I. 127, 141, 162); and to the later Ebionites, as I suppose he must be understood, so far as he had any distinct meaning, he ascribes opinions respecting the Jewish Law, its sacrifices, the Jewish prophets,

most probable supposition is, that the author was a Gentile convert, a philosopher, who had been impressed by the in-

the manifestation of Christ in Adam and in others, the duty of abstinence from animal food, and the absence of any merit in celibacy, similar to those of the author of the Homilies. He says, likewise, (p. 139), that the Ebionites used "The Circuits of Peter" (*Αἱ Περιόδου Πέτρου*), the authorship of which he attributes to the Apostolical Father, Clement of Rome, but that they had so corrupted the book as to leave little in it that was true; for that the doctrine of Clement was in fact wholly contrary to their opinions. There can be little doubt that the book which he refers to was the Homilies, essentially uncorrupted. Hence it has been concluded that the author of the Homilies was a Jewish Christian of the class of the Ebionites, according to the nomenclature of Epiphanius.

But the account given by Epiphanius of the Ebionites bears his usual characteristics of folly, inconsistency, and evident want of truth. Probably the sect existed in his day only in some inconsiderable remains of it. His materials for an account of it were apparently scanty; and he has made up a great part of his article by a digression, consisting of fabulous stories concerning real or pretended converts from Judaism to orthodoxy. His assertion, that the doctrines contained in the Clementine Homilies were held by a portion of the Jewish Christians, is confirmed by no credible writer. Nothing like it is said by the earlier fathers, contemporary with the Ebionites, when the Ebionites were more numerous; and the fact is in itself very improbable. His account of the Ebionites should be read in connection with his accounts of the Nasaræans (Hæres. XVIII.), and of the Ossenes (Hæres. XIX.), both Jewish sects, as he pretends, which existed before the coming of Christ (p. 31), and likewise of the Sampseans or Elcesæans (Hæres. LIII.), of all which sects he represents an individual of the name of Elxai as the founder, or reformer, or chief teacher (pp. 40, 43, 127, 461). The whole taken together presents such a mass of assertions, for which he could have had no authority, of gross improbabilities, inconsistencies, and evident fictions, as to show that no credit is to be attached to any statement respecting the Ebionites which rests solely on his authority. As I have mentioned, he has been supposed to ascribe to them the use of the Clementine Homilies. But the Homilies are a long work, written in Greek; and

trinsic worth of Christianity, but who was very imperfectly informed respecting its early history, being probably unac-

from much which he says of the Ebionites (pp. 127, 130, 137), the obvious inference (an inference confirmed by better authority) is, that the generality of them used no books, at least no books of a religious kind, but such as were in the Hebrew language. His purpose in ascribing the doctrines of the Homilies, and the use of this book, to an heretical Jewish sect may, not improbably, have been to bring the work into disrepute; for it appears to have had a degree of reputation and celebrity even in the fourth century, notwithstanding its heterodoxy.

It may, however, be conjectured, that, before the time of Epiphanius, the author of the Homilies had been called an Ebionite, as a term of reproach, by some who were offended at his doctrines; especially, perhaps, at his representing Moses and Christ as on an equality, and the ministry of one as being essentially of the same character with that of the other. In applying to him the name "Ebionite," we may suppose that they meant that he was no better than an Ebionite. A heretic they thought him, but he evidently was not a Gnostic; and beside the Gnostics, there were no others clearly recognized as heretics in his time except the Ebionites; and with these he might be regarded as having some correspondences.

Such an application to him of the name of Ebionite may have led to the fabrication of two pieces, prefixed to the Homilies in the manuscript published by Cotelier, one purporting to be an Epistle of Peter to James, and the other called the Adjuration of James. These, unquestionably, are not the work of the author of the Homilies. They are written under the character of an Ebionite. Peter, in his Epistle, is made to exhort that the books of his preaching (the Homilies), which he sends to James, should be privately communicated only to Jewish Christians whose characters were well ascertained; and, conformably to this, James, in his Adjuration, is represented as solemnly adjuring those to whom he delivers the work not to suffer it to pass into the hands of any unworthy person. But, whatever may have afforded a pretence for these compositions, it is not unlikely that they are an ancient bookseller's fraud, intended to give a factitious value to some copy or copies of the work, by representing it as one very difficult to be procured by Gentile Christians.

It might be inferred from some notices of the Homilies, in modern

quainted with any book of the New Testament, except the Gospels.

THE Homilies are, I conceive, of no authority to determine the real or professed opinions of Simon Magus. What is related of his life and magical deeds is evidently fabulous; and on this ground alone we might well distrust the representation of his doctrines. Simon is merely introduced as an historical personage into a work of fiction. He is exhibited, according to the common conception of him, as a magician and an enemy of Christianity; but all the detail concerning his discourses and actions is evidently imaginary. Taking advantage of the popular notions concerning him, the writer of the Homilies, there can be little doubt, ascribed to him at pleasure certain opinions which he regarded as consistent with his character, and which it was his own purpose to confute. That his representations of the tenets of Simon are not to be relied on appears from the license of fiction with which he ascribes his own doctrines to St. Peter. In connection with this, the writer's ignorance of opinions existing in the first century may be inferred from his extraordinary violations of chronology respecting the early history of Christianity, and from the inconsistent fictions which he has blended with it. He who is not familiar with the well-known historical facts of any period cannot be supposed to be acquainted with the opinions con-

times, that the writer held the common opinion of the Jewish Christians, that Christ was only a man. But this was not the case. He regarded Christ, not as God, but, under the character of the Son of God, as a divine being, the glory of whose form unclothed with flesh no man could see and live, and who alone could behold the glory of the Father. (Homil. XVII. § 16.)

nected with them; for facts are more easily learned than opinions.

The Homilies commence with a narrative in which Clement, the fictitious author, relates, that, while he was in perplexity and distress concerning religion, in the reign of Tiberius, he heard a report of the preaching of Jesus, as having commenced in Judea in the spring of the year during which the report reached Rome; that some one, the same year, publicly announced the divine mission of Christ in that city; that in consequence he determined to sail for Judea, but was driven by contrary winds to Alexandria; that here he found Barnabas, who was preaching Christ; and that, Barnabas leaving Alexandria, he himself sailed for Cæsarea, where Peter was then preaching, with whom his intimacy immediately commenced.* All these are related as events of the year when Christ began to preach. But, after several other anachronisms, we find Peter, among his first discourses, a few days after the arrival of Clement, speaking of the prophecy of Jesus concerning the destruction of Jerusalem as already confirmed by the event.† The story throughout belongs to a period much later than the date given at its commencement. These errors, it may be said, are only proofs of strange inadvertence, and cannot be ascribed to mere ignorance. But it is such inad-

* Homil. I. §§ 6 - 16.

† Homil. III. § 15. — It may be noted, as a proof of the unskillfulness with which the *Recognitions* were fashioned from the Homilies, that the former work commences with a similar narrative, while, after an interval of still fewer pages, Peter is introduced as speaking of the crucifixion of Jesus, and relating what happened to the Apostles after his death. Lib. I. § 41, seqq. Comp. Lib. IX. § 29. It may, at the same time, be conjectured that the writer observed the grosser mistake of his original, for he makes Peter speak of the Jewish War as only impending over the unbelieving nation. Lib. I. § 39.

vertence as the author could hardly have fallen into, had he been familiar with the events in the early history of Christianity, even so far as they may be learned from the New Testament.

His want of any just conceptions of the events and characters of that period appears, likewise, in the fictions which he has introduced. Thus, he has a strange notion, which he puts into the mouth of Peter, that God disposes things on earth in pairs; and that among men, subsequently to Adam, the first, in order of time, of each pair is evil, and the second good. John the Baptist and Christ, according to him, formed such a pair, and, in consequence, John is clearly, though somewhat indirectly, represented by him as evil.* Conformably to this, he reports that Simon and Helena were among his disciples, and that after John's death Simon supplanted his immediate successor, Dositheus, and became the head of his school.† This representation was perhaps founded on the existence of a sect of professed disciples of John the Baptist, who opposed him to Christ, a sect of which there seem to be some obscure indications in the New Testament; and of which it has been conjectured, not without probability, that the remains still exist in the East under the name of Sabians, the Sabians regarding John, and not Christ, as the chosen minister of God. In the *Recognitions*, though no impeachment is thrown on John's character, it is said that "some very considerable persons among his disciples preached their master as the Christ."‡

It shows the very low state of criticism in the fourth cen-

* Homil. II. §§ 15-17, 23. — This view of John's character is not admitted into the *Recognitions*, the passages of the *Homilies* just referred to being altered. Compare *Recognitions*, Book III. §§ 55, 59, 61, and Book II. § 8.

† Homil. II. §§ 23, 24.

‡ Lib. I. §§ 54, 60.

tury, that, notwithstanding such characteristics of the narrative, writers of much note at that period, as Rufinus * and Epiphanius,† ascribed its authorship to Clement, the Apostolical Father, the supposed companion and friend of St. Paul. In the next century, the ecclesiastical historian, Sozomen, on the ground of this narrative, reckoned Clement as the earliest ecclesiastical historian among Christians.‡

In modern times the Homilies have not been much attended to. "These books," says Lardner, speaking of the Homilies and the Recognitions, "may be both of some use, and may deserve a more particular examination than has been yet given them." The discovery of the Homilies, and their first publication (which was in 1672), are comparatively of recent date. They have been too much confounded with the Recognitions, a work of a far inferior character, and of no value to one acquainted with the Homilies; and they have been erroneously, I think, regarded as a supposititious production. At the same time they do not possess much intrinsic interest except to one who is studying the effect of the promulgation of Christianity on the state of opinion. They are, however, the earliest example remaining of a fictitious narrative in prose of any considerable length, interwoven with events and interests of common life. No preceding work now extant has such resemblance to a modern novel; and the author, notwithstanding his historical errors, shows considerable talent in the management of the story, in the naturalness of the dialogue, and in the preservation of a consistent character in different individuals.

* See the preface to his Translation of the Recognitions, and his Treatise on the Adulteration of Origen's Writings.

† Hæres. XXX. § 15. Opp. I. 139. ‡ Hist. Eccles. Lib. I. c. 1.

NOTE C.

(See p. 187.)

ON THE FALSE CHARGES BROUGHT AGAINST THE HERETICS, PARTICULARLY BY THE LATER FATHERS.

It is the purpose of this Note to show with what incredulity we may regard many of the charges brought against the Gnostics (the Christian Gnostics), particularly by the later fathers. This will appear — for we may confine ourselves to a single line of argument — by showing that similar charges were brought by them against the Montanists, and by the Heathens against the whole body of Christians; in both which cases we cannot hesitate to reject them as utterly unfounded.

THE Montanists had their origin in the latter half of the second century, though it is not probable that they were generally considered as heretics till after its close. They were distinguished by believing in the miraculous inspiration of their founder, Montanus, and of some of his followers, particularly two women, Maximilla, and Prisca or Priscilla. Montanus they regarded as having come to reform and perfect the Church, and establish its discipline. They were enthusiasts, who, in asserting his inspiration and that of other members of their sect, fell into an error which has often been repeated by different classes of religionists from their time to our own, and which was then particularly favored by the

common belief, that miraculous powers, and among them the spirit of prophecy, or of inspired teaching, still subsisted in the Christian community. With this error, which was the main point in controversy between them and the catholic Christians, they united rigid asceticism and peculiar severity in inflicting ecclesiastical censures for immorality. But their general views of the doctrines of Christianity did not differ from those commonly received. They were enthusiasts and reformers, who exasperated other Christians against them by charging them with laxity of principle, because they did not adopt their severe modes of life and discipline. The character of the sect recommended it to the stern morality, the excitable feelings, and the austere temper of Tertullian, who became a member, and from whose subsequent writings is to be learned most of what may be relied on as true concerning it. There was a great difference of temperament between Tertullian and Fenelon; but the delusion of Tertullian may be compared with that of Fenelon in his connection with Madame de Guion and the Quietists. Tertullian was accustomed, after joining the Montanists, to denominate common Christians by the same term which the Gnostics applied to them, *Psychici*, the implied sense of which may be given in English by the words *not spiritual*; but, at the same time, in speaking of catholic Christians, he says, — “We have communion with them in the law of peace and the name of brotherhood. One faith is common to us and them, one God, the same Christ, the same hope, the same sacrament of baptism, and, to say all in a word, we are one Church.” *

Tertullian informs us that one of the bishops of Rome (it is uncertain to whom he refers) was for a time favorably

* De Virginibus velandis, c. 2. p. 173.

disposed toward the Montanists, and that he acknowledged, or was inclined to acknowledge, the proper inspiration of Montanus, Prisca, and Maximilla.* Agreeing in doctrine, as the Montanists did, with other Christians, it seems to have been only by degrees that the breach was so widened that they became a separate sect, generally considered heretical. There were, it is admitted, martyrs, they said many martyrs, from among their number.† Such being the character of the Montanists, let us see how they were spoken of in the fourth and fifth centuries.

Eusebius, who is followed by later writers, says that they regarded Montanus as the Paraclete.‡ This is a misrepresentation, of which the source is obvious. What they really believed was, that the Holy Spirit, or Paraclete, spoke by Montanus. He then goes on to collect various angry calumnies concerning them, without interposing a word of candor or good-sense. These reports it is not worth while to repeat. We may proceed at once to the more extravagant falsehoods found in subsequent writers.

Cyril of Jerusalem (about the middle of the fourth century) speaks of Montanus "as sacrificing the miserable little children of women, and cutting them up for horrible food, upon the occasion of what they [the Montanists] call their mysteries."§ By "their mysteries" Cyril intends their celebration of the Lord's Supper. "Montanus," says Isidore of Pelusium,|| "allows the use of magic, and the mur-

* *Advers. Praxeam*, c. 1. p. 501.

† *Eusebii Hist. Eccles. Lib. V. c. 16.*

‡ *Ibid. c. 14.*

§ *Cataphesis XVI. § 4. p. 227. Ed. Milles.*

|| *De Interpret. Div. Scripturæ. Lib. I. Ep. 242. pp. 56, 57. Ed. Ritterhusii.*

der of children, and adultery, and the worship of idols." Epiphanius affirms that Montanus declared himself to be "the Lord God omnipotent, dwelling among men." * "In this heresy," he relates, "or in the allied heresy of the Quintillians, a horrible and detestable act is said to be performed; that upon the occasion of some festival they thrust brass pins into the whole body of an infant, and collecting the blood use it in the preparation of their sacrifice," † — meaning the bread of the Eucharist. Epiphanius immediately proceeds to say, that he relates nothing concerning the heretics but upon good authority, lest he should appear to have no more regard to truth than the heretics themselves. After this commendation, however, of his own scrupulous veracity, he gains confidence, and affirms directly of the Quintillians, whom he represents as one branch of the Montanists, what he had before stated as a report.‡ This story is repeated by Philaster,§ and by Augustine,|| being likewise given by them as a report, but without any suggestion of a doubt respecting its truth. Jerome, who, with all his great faults, had something generous in his temper, manifests a degree of proper feeling concerning it. *Malo non credere*, he says. *Sit falsum omne quod sanguinis est*; ¶ "I would rather not believe it. Let the whole story about blood be false." At a still later period, Theodoret, with more good-sense than any of his predecessors, simply notices the story thus: — "Some spread reports concerning certain things in their mysteries; but they do not acknowledge these reports to be true; on the contrary, they say that

* Hæres. XLVIII. § 11. p. 412.

† Ibid. § 14. p. 416.

‡ Ibid. § 15. p. 417.

§ De Hæresibus, col. 18.

|| Catal. Hæres. Opp. VI. col. 17.

¶ Epist. 27. Ad Marcellam. Opp. Tom. IV. P. II. col. 65.

they are calumnies."* If other heretics had been listened to, we should doubtless have found many things in the later fathers denounced by them with equal truth as calumnies.

Thus it appears that the series of charges against the Montanists may afford an instructive lesson, to one studying the history of the heretics, of the necessity of exercising a severe judgment upon the accounts of them that have been transmitted to us; and of the amount of matter which, especially in the writers from Eusebius downward, is to be rejected as fabulous.

BUT it deserves further observation, that scandals like those against the Montanists were early circulated respecting Christians in general. They particularly respected their Agapæ, or Feasts of Love, which were consecrated as a religious observance by the celebration of the Lord's Supper. "Do you believe," says Justin Martyr to Trypho, "that we eat human flesh, and, after this banquet, put out the lights and wallow in horrible lewdness?"—"As for what is commonly reported," Trypho replies, "it is not worthy of credit, for it is wholly abhorrent from human nature."† Some of the fathers of the fourth century, in writing concerning heretics, or even Justin himself on another occasion, where he will not undertake to say that such stories were not true of the heretics,‡ might well have remembered this reply. It is remarkable that the charge of horrible lewdness in their pretended religious meetings was not brought against the Montanists in connection with that of eating human flesh or blood. The peculiar sternness of

* Hæret. Fab. Lib. III. n. 2. Opp. IV. 227.

† Dial. cum Tryph. pp. 155, 156.

‡ I. Apologia, p. 43.

their discipline in respect to breaches of chastity may have prevented its obtaining currency. The calumnies against Christians generally are noticed by many other writers besides Justin. "They charge us with three crimes," says Athenagoras, — "atheism, Thyestean feasts, and Œdipean debaucheries."* "We are affirmed to be the most wicked of men," says Tertullian, "killing and eating infants as a sacrament, and concluding with incest."† According to Origen, there were those who pretended that Christians had been discovered in the very act of committing these crimes.‡ Were it worth while, many other passages might be quoted to the same effect.

THE occasion of these calumnies may be thus explained. The charge of eating human flesh, I conceive, was derived, in part, from a perverse misconception of the figurative language of the New Testament, and of the early Christians, concerning the Lord's Supper, as a participation of the body and blood of Christ. It was also probably connected with the imputation of magical arts, to which some of the heretical and pseudo-Christian sects made pretence, and which at an early period were charged upon Christians generally. Nor was this strange; for to magic, as we know, the miracles of the founder of our religion were ascribed both by its Jewish and heathen opponents; and, doubtless, so also were the miracles of the Apostles, and of his other followers by whom miracles were wrought. But in the magical rites of the Heathens children were put to death and human sacrifices offered. Such, at least, was

* *Legatio pro Christianis*, § 3. p. 232.

† *Apologet.* c. 7. p. 7.

‡ *Cont. Cel.* Lib. IV. § 40. Opp. I. 662.

the popular belief; * nor is there any reason to doubt that it was founded on fact. The name of "sacrifice" was very early given by Christians to the Eucharist; and the infant reported to be immolated in this rite was, I suppose, imagined to be a magical sacrifice, of the flesh of which, as in the case of other offerings, the assistants partook.† The Supper was also called a "sacrament" (*sacramentum*), that is, a religious pledge or oath; and by such a sacrament of blood as was conceived of, it was probably thought that Christians bound themselves in a more direful manner to their "detestable superstition," as it was called by Tacitus.

But the Supper was also denominated a Christian "mystery," in opposition to the Heathen mysteries. During the ages of persecution, it was often celebrated secretly, in the night, in private houses. It does not appear, that before the third century Christians had any public buildings, or proper churches, for their religious meetings. Thus originated the other part of the charge respecting debauchery; for, in their own mysteries, under similar circumstances, the more depraved of the Heathens practised the grossest impurities, — impurities on which Juvenal exhausts all the loathsome coarseness and strength of his invective. The

* Thus, Lucan says, in his description of the Thessalian witch Erichtho (Lib. VI. v. 556, seqq.): —

"Nec refugit cædes, vivum si sacra cruorem,
Extaque funeres poscunt trepidantia mensæ.
Vulnere sic ventris, non quâ Natura vocabat,
Extrahitur partus, calidis ponendus in aris.
Et quoties sævis opus est, ac fortibus umbris,
Ipsa facit manes: hominum mors omnis in usu est."

† In treating of magic, the elder Pliny says: — "Nec satis æstimari potest, quantum Romanis debeatur, qui sustulere monstra, in quibus hominem occidere religiosissimum erat, mandi vero etiam saluberrium." Hist. Nat. Lib. XXX. c. 4.

heathen enemies of Christianity, therefore, readily believed that the Christians practised in *their* mysteries abominations like those which they knew to be common in their own.

THESE calumnies against Christians, or calumnies equally outrageous, were believed by the most enlightened among the Heathens ; for they were believed by Tacitus. Hence, he speaks of Christianity as “ a detestable superstition, which, having been repressed through the punishment of its author by the Procurator, Pontius Pilate, again broke out and spread through Judæa, where the evil had its origin, and thence through Rome, where all atrocious and shameful things flow together and find favor.” The Christians, he says, were “ detested for their infamous vices.” They were charged by Nero with having set fire to the city. Of this crime they were not convicted, but “ of hatred to the human race.” Thus convicted, “ a great multitude,” as he relates, were put to death by horrible tortures. Sport was made of their agonies, *percutibus addita ludibria*, “ as they were wrapped in the skins of wild beasts, and baited by dogs ; or nailed to crosses ; or burnt to serve as lanterns by night.” The gardens of Nero were thrown open to entertain the populace with the spectacle of their sufferings, and mock Circensian games were there celebrated, the Emperor playing the part of a charioteer, — while supplications and ceremonies were going on, in the city, to propitiate the gods. In relating the frightful cruelties inflicted by Nero on the Christians, the humanity and moral sense of Tacitus appear to have deserted him. He says : — “ Compassion was excited, — though they were guilty, and deserved to be made examples of the severest punishment, *et novissima exempla meritos*, — because it seemed that they

were destroyed, not for the public good, but through the savageness of an individual." *

* Annal. Lib. XV. c. 44. — Gibbon (Ch. XVI. Vol. II. p. 404, seqq.) has given a translation of this passage, in a style very unlike that of Tacitus, and then endeavoured to draw away attention from it by a series of trifling and irrelevant remarks, which, if it were not for their evident purpose, might seem only to indicate a want of judgment and feeling in the writer. Among these remarks there are none with which we are concerned, except two contradictory suggestions. One of them is, that the cause which directed the cruelty of Nero against the Christians was their being confounded (that is to say, their being confounded by Nero) with the fierce zealots among the Jews, the followers of Judas the Gaulonite (or Galilean), who, as well as the Christians, were called Galileans. After stating this conjecture, Gibbon proceeds to his next suggestion, *as an inference from it*. "How natural was it," he says, "for Tacitus, in the time of Hadrian, to appropriate to the Christians the guilt and sufferings, which he might, with far greater truth and justice, have attributed to a sect whose odious memory was almost extinguished!" The meaning of which is, that it was a natural error for Tacitus to report of the Christians what was true, not of them, but of the Jewish sect or party of the Galileans. According to this double hypothesis, Nero persecuted the Christians by mistake for those Galileans, the followers of Judas the Gaulonite; and Tacitus was mistaken in supposing that the Christians were persecuted, since it was not they who suffered, but the followers of Judas.

But though the Christians were called Galileans, the followers of Judas were not called Christians; and Tacitus and Suetonius relate that it was the Christians, the followers of Christ (as the former expressly says), who endured such dreadful sufferings from the cruelty of Nero. Nor was Tacitus ignorant of the existence of the Christians of his own time, whom, while he was writing his Annals, his friend Pliny was torturing and condemning to death, though he could "find nothing against them but their bad and excessive superstition" (*nihil aliud inveni quam superstitionem pravam et immodicam*). Against the Christians of his own time, whose characters he might have known, Tacitus, no bigot, certainly, to the religion of his an-

It is difficult to form a correct estimate of the moral worth of those who have lived in remote ages, under circumstances very unlike our own. We are apt to pass a severe judgment (not certainly without some reason) on those of the later fathers who were very ready to admit and propagate calumnies against the heretics. But I know of nothing in their writings so dark and atrocious as this passage from Tacitus. They have nowhere, I think, described the terrible sufferings of men, whom they might have ascertained to be innocent, and affirmed that they deserved to suffer. Yet this passage was written by one whose extraordinary intellect has stamped an imperishable value on that portion of his works which has survived the deluge of the dark ages, and who, in his high moral sense, appears to have had no superior among his heathen contemporaries.

HAD the Christians been destroyed by persecution, and had their books perished, if we may be allowed to make such suppositions, we could have had no particular reason for rejecting the description given of them by Tacitus, false as it now appears. Few ancient writers, on the ground of personal character, can put forward higher claims to credit. We might thus have been led into the grossest error; and hence we have another lesson to teach us with what distrust and scrutiny it is proper for us to examine the accounts which, in ancient times, either Christian or heathen

cestors, contributed to inflame the popular enmity, by giving the sanction of his great name to the most cruel calumnies. To a philosopher the subject may suggest other trains of thought and feeling than those which occurred to Gibbon; and among them, while he is contemplating such error in such a man as Tacitus, may be a deep sense of the fallibility of our nature, even in the wisest.

writers have given of those against whom their prejudices were excited. In modern times both the writer and the reader may have far wider means of information, and the writer may be far more restrained by the dread of open contradiction and confutation, if not by any better motive.

But another more general reflection forces itself on the mind. One cannot help considering what reliance may be placed on the representations of an ancient author, when they cannot be, or when they are not, confronted with other accounts, or compared with known facts, or viewed in relation to his character, circumstances, and purpose, or tried by their intrinsic probability. The passage from Tacitus shows us, that we may find statements made with the greatest confidence by a writer of high authority, which are wholly at variance with the truth.

NOTE D.

(See p. 281.)

ON THE JEWISH DISPENSATION, THE PENTATEUCH, AND THE OTHER BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

SECTION I.

Preliminary Remarks.

IN the Chapter treating of the opinions of the Gnostics, and of the early catholic Christians, respecting the Jewish dispensation and the Old Testament, the difficulties attending the subject are brought into view. But it would have been out of place there to present a solution of them, accompanied with the explanations required. To do this is the purpose of the present Note. We have seen how the Old Testament was regarded by the early Christians, the catholic Christians as well as the heretics. How it should be regarded is a question of much interest.

SUCH is the connection between Christianity and the Jewish religion, that the divine origin of the former implies the divine origin of the latter. Christianity, if I may so speak, has made itself responsible for the fact, that the Jewish religion, like itself, proceeded immediately from God. But Christianity has not made itself responsible for the genuineness, the authenticity, or the moral and religious teachings, of that collection of books by Jewish writers,

which constitutes the Old Testament. Taken collectively, it may appear, on the one hand, that those books possess a high and very peculiar character, which affords strong evidence of the divine origin of the Jewish religion; and it may appear, on the other hand, that they also contain much that is incredible, and much that does not approve itself to our understanding and moral feelings. But if the latter be the case, it is a fact with which Christianity is not concerned. Our religion is no more answerable for the genuineness, or the contents, of a series of Jewish writings, dating from an uncertain period, and continued till after the return of a part of the nation from the Babylonish captivity, than it is responsible for the genuineness and contents of the works ascribed to Christian authors from the second century to the eleventh. The truth of our religion is no more involved in the truth of all that is related in the Books of Judges, of Kings, and of Chronicles, or in the Pentateuch, supposing the Pentateuch not to be the work of Moses, than it is in the truth of all that is related in the Ecclesiastical Histories of Eusebius, Sozomen, and Theodoret.

If these propositions be true, they go far to remove those difficulties which not only embarrassed the early Christians, but which have continued to embarrass Christians in every age. But if they be true, a great error has been committed both by Christians and by unbelievers. The most popular and effective objections of unbelievers have been directed, not against Christianity, but against the Old Testament, on the ground that Christianity is responsible for the truth, and for the moral and religious character, of all its contents; and, instead of repelling so untenable a proposition, believers have likewise assumed it; or rather they have earnestly affirmed its correctness, and proceeded to argue upon it as they could.

Thus the books composing the Old Testament have been stripped of their true character, which renders them an object of the greatest curiosity and interest ; and a false character has been ascribed to them, which brings them into perpetual collision with the moral and religious conceptions of men of more enlightened times than those of their writers, with the principles of rational criticism in the interpretation of language, and even with the progress of the physical sciences. Insuperable objections to the character ascribed to them, objections such as presented themselves to the minds of the early catholic Christians and the Gnostics, lie spread over the surface of these writings. To those objections, thus obvious, familiarity may render us insensible or indifferent. We may pass over them without regard. We may rest in the notion that they admit of some explanation. We may acquiesce, with more or less distrust, in theories and expositions by which it has been attempted to gloss them over. But, in proportion as these books are critically examined, and as knowledge and correct modes of thinking advance, new objections start up. These, from their novelty, often receive a disproportioned share of notice ; and much is thought to be done, if the force of some one that has recently become an object of attention can be broken ; while difficulties more important are comparatively neglected.

Every one knows for how long a time there was a struggle between the authority falsely ascribed to the Old Testament, and the true system of the planetary motions. It is only within the present century that it may be considered as having ceased, so far as the Roman Catholic Church, that is, so far as the majority of Christians, is concerned. In our day the discoveries in geology have, in like manner, been encountered by the narrative given in Genesis of the

Creation. Attempts, which to many seem abortive, have been made to reconcile them to each other. But, in the mean time, a greater difficulty, as implying greater ignorance of the true constitution of the physical world, has attracted comparatively little notice, though it occurs likewise in the account of the Creation. It is there taught, according to the obvious meaning of language, that the blue vault of heaven is a solid firmament, separating the waters which are above it from the waters on the earth, and that in this firmament the heavenly bodies are placed.*

The supposed necessity of maintaining the truth of all that the writers of the Old Testament have said or implied has operated, as might be expected, in a manner the most prejudicial to a firm and rational faith in Christianity. The philosopher, who cannot but regard many of the representations of the Deity in the Old Testament as inconsistent with his character; the enlightened Christian, who is unable to believe that God commanded the indiscriminate massacre of men, women, and children by his chosen people, in order to prepare them for his service; the moralist, who perceives that the principles and feelings expressed or approved in portions of these books belong to an unenlightened and barbarous age; the careful inquirer, who finds that there are parts of the history which he cannot receive as true, because

* "And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament heaven. And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth." Genesis i. 7, 8, 14, 17. Compare the account of the Deluge, in which it is said, that "the windows of heaven were opened," and Psalm cxlviii. 4, where "the waters above the heavens" are called upon to praise the Lord.

they involve contradictions, or are contrary to all probability; he, in a word, who, examining without prejudice, sees the many objections to which the Old Testament is exposed, when put forward as an authoritative guide in religion, morals, and history (even if such authority be not claimed for it in the physical sciences), is told, that, if he would be a Christian, he must renounce his objections, and that it is a part of his religion to receive the Old Testament as bearing such a character. The solutions of the objections to its supposed character, which have been offered by wise and good men, are often such that it is difficult to believe them to have been satisfactory to the proposer. They proceed on false principles, or unfounded assumptions. They are often superficial, evasive, or incoherent. They appear to result from a feeling of the necessity of saying something. They are often such as can be regarded by any one as admissible only on the ground that there must be some mode of explaining away all such objections, and therefore that there is, in every case, a presumption in favor of a particular explanation, when no other can be found so plausible. Thus, then, the truth of Christianity having been made to appear as if implicated in the truth of a position that cannot be maintained, its evidences, though their intrinsic validity has not been weakened, have been deprived of much of their power over the minds of men.

IN expressing these opinions, one is but giving form and voice to the ideas and feelings that exist in the minds of a large portion of intelligent believers. There is nothing in them of novelty or boldness. One is but saying what many have thought before him with more or less distinctness. But he who discusses the errors that have been connected with our religion, for the purpose of separating them from it,

and preventing their further hindrance to its reception and influence, must prosecute his labor under a great disadvantage ; for he is liable to be altogether misunderstood or misrepresented. There are two classes of writers who, with wholly opposite views, have called attention to these errors. One class consists of those who have confounded them with our religion, who regard them as essential parts of it, who direct their reasoning or their ridicule against them, and, in exposing them, consider themselves as confuting the claims of Christianity. The other class is composed of such as, with a deep sense of the value of our religion, are solicitous to remove from it all that has obscured its character and weakened its power. The purpose of one class is the very opposite of that of the other ; but they agree as to the nature of the errors. By both they are equally considered as indefensible ; and often this correspondence alone is regarded, and the most earnest defenders of Christianity have been confounded with its enemies by such Christians as agree with its enemies in viewing those errors as essential to our faith.

It is, at the same time, not to be doubted that he who has been compelled to renounce many prejudices respecting Christianity is in danger of becoming unable to discriminate between what is true and what is false, and, consequently, of renouncing our religion altogether. As he relinquishes one doctrine after another, which he had held as a part of his faith, a skeptical turn of mind is likely to be formed ; a prejudice may grow up against whatever has been received as true ; his judgment may become bewildered, and he may lose confidence in its decisions, except when they favor unbelief ; while, having been led wrong by the guides whom he had trusted, he is also deprived of that reliance on the judgment of others which is so often important or necessary

to the strength of our convictions, and even to the formation of our opinions. All this may take place in the mind of one whose intentions and feelings are wholly honest. Religious truth, which so many have been seeking for so many centuries, and which, amid the vast diversity and opposition of opinions, it is clear that so few can have found, is not to be secured by mere honesty of intention and feeling. To separate from Christianity what has been erroneously connected with it, and what has become incorporated with the religion of many Christians, — I mean, to effect the separation in one's own mind, — is not an easy task. It is not strange that some, whose attention has been strongly directed to those errors, should have failed to accomplish it; that they should have wanted the learning and judgment, the power of discrimination, the integrity of purpose, the just conception of the essential character of Christianity, and the deep sense of its value, which are prerequisites and sufficient safeguards in the inquiry; and that, having begun as reformers, they should have ended in being unbelievers.

Equally by those who consecrate the errors of Christians as parts of Christianity, and by those who reject our religion on account of them, a rational Christian is liable to be questioned, how it is that he retains his Christian faith, while he puts aside so much that Christians have believed; and it may be suggested to him by both parties, that, if he will but follow out his principles, he will become an infidel. But the gross errors which a great majority of Christians have fallen into tend in no degree to invalidate the evidences of Christianity. The inquiry concerning those errors has no bearing on the intrinsic weight of its evidences. That the professed disciples of Christ, through eighteen centuries, have not been miraculously divested of the infirmities and

vices of their fellow-men, and thus secured from religious error, is a fact which, however striking or shocking are the illustrations that may be given of it, cannot be brought to disprove the proposition, that Christ was a teacher from God. It does not follow that there is no truth, or that there is no evidence sufficient to establish the truth, concerning the highest objects of human thought, because a very great majority of our race has fallen into essential mistakes concerning them. Christianity may be true, notwithstanding the false doctrines that have accumulated round it; just as it is true that the heavenly bodies exist and move, notwithstanding the prevailing theories concerning them from the beginning of science to the sixteenth century were wholly erroneous.

It is evident, from what has been said, that he who is about to direct his attention to the errors which men have fallen into respecting religion should settle in his mind what religion is, and what Christianity is, and in what their value consists. It may be said that this should be a result of the inquiry, not a preliminary to it; that we must first ascertain how far Christians have been in error, before we can determine what is to be received as true. But such is not the case. Reasoning philosophically, we are not first to inquire into what men have believed, whether correctly or not; we are to look only at the essential considerations which should determine our judgment concerning religion and Christianity.

All religion is founded solely on two facts,—the existence of God, and the immortality of man. Our relations to the Infinite Spirit and to the endless future alone constitute us religious beings. If we knew that there was no God and Father of the Universe, and that we were to perish when

we die, there could be no religion. It is through faith in God and immortality that man ceases to appear as a blind, suffering, short-lived creature of earth, and becomes transformed into a being capable of the noblest views and aspirations, of unlimited progress in virtue and happiness; having a permanent tenure in the Universe, the eternal care of God.

The value of Christianity consists in its giving men assurance of these fundamental truths. It is the source from which the knowledge and belief of them have spread among men. On Christianity the religious faith equally of the wise and the ignorant must ultimately rest.

It has been vaguely and erroneously said, that all men, whether enlightened by revelation or not, have a belief in God; and this belief has been represented as instinctive, or intuitive, as a matter of consciousness, as a part of our nature, or as necessarily resulting from our nature. The proposition has no other foundation than this, that all men are compelled to recognize the fact that there are powers, that is, agencies, without them, stronger than they, by which their actions are controlled, and their condition essentially affected. To these powers, by an act of imagination and association similar to that which leads a child to love the inanimate object that pleases it, or to be angry with that which hurts it, men have transferred moral qualities, and thus personified them; they have endued inanimate objects with life, and worshipped them, as the sun, moon, and stars; or they have ascribed the effects experienced to some imaginary being, or to some being whose power had been felt on earth. But the obvious recognition of an indisputable fact, accompanied by one of the most ordinary operations of the mind, is not religion. It does not constitute faith in God. The believer in the Egyptian mythology, or in the

fabulous gods of Greece and Rome, was not a believer in God. There was nothing in his opinions or imaginations to produce those sentiments, or that character, which are the proper result of a Christian's faith. The heathen gods were but rulers of the same essential nature with earthly despots. The belief in them was not elevating, but degrading. The heathen religions consecrated vice in their very solemnities, but offered no encouragements to virtue, and no consolations or hopes to suffering man. The Jewish and Christian Scriptures truly represent idolatry, not as it has been conceived of in modern times, as an imperfect development of true religion, but as its opposite.

Religion must not be confounded with superstition. The belief of error is not the same thing as the belief of truth. The imperfection of language has in this, as in a thousand other cases, led to a great mistake; for in one sense of the word *religion*, we apply it to the superstitions or false religions that have existed in the world; and men have, in consequence, classed them together with true religion, as if they all possessed a character essentially alike. But true religion and false religion are essentially different.

There is no instinctive, intuitive, or direct knowledge of the truths of religion; neither of the being of God, nor of our own immortality. It is scarcely a matter of dispute, if indeed it be at all a matter of dispute, that of our own immortality, — the great fact which changes the aspect of all things and assimilates man to the Divinity; the fact without the belief, or, at least, without the hope, of which there can be no religion, — that of our own immortality we can be assured only by revelation. It may, indeed, be the case, that a being of perfect reason might, from the phenomena of the present state known to man, infer not only the existence

of God, but our power of attaining an immortal existence. But man is not a being of perfect reason; and of the individuals who compose our race there are comparatively very few who have a wide acquaintance with the phenomena of the present state, or who are capable of reasoning on any subject remote from their common experience.

It is not necessary, however, to inquire, as if the question were unsettled, what the collective wisdom of men, unassisted by revelation, can effect toward producing a conviction of the essential truths of religion. The question has been answered. It is answered in the teachings of Socrates, and in the writings of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero. They had no distinct conception of God, as God is conceived of by an enlightened Christian. They had either no belief, or no confident belief, of the personal immortality of individual men. If any one doubt these statements, they require explanation and discussion. But there is something more to be said. The question is further answered — and this answer requires no explanation, for it admits of no controversy — by the state of religion among their contemporaries, by the general absence of any conception of God, or of any assurance of immortality. It is answered in the mythology of the Hindoos, in the adoration of human divinities by the Buddhists, degenerating into the worship of the Dalai-lama, and in the other superstitions which, in ancient and modern times, have overspread the earth where the light of revelation has not shone.

Undoubtedly there are very noble conceptions of the Divinity, mixed, however, with much that is altogether incongruous, in the speculations of ancient sages. Such conceptions appear, for example, in the writings of Plato, and in the Vedas and other sacred books of the Hindoos. But the question is not, what a few philosophers unenlight-

ened by revelation have believed or imagined, but what the generality of men unenlightened by revelation have believed or imagined. However strong the evidence of religious truth from the phenomena of nature may be in the abstract, and very strong undoubtedly it is, yet the fact is proved by the experience of the world,—it is proved, I believe, by the personal experience of every one who has thought and felt deeply on the subject,—that men, left to themselves, are incapable of grasping and estimating it, and of resting satisfied in the conclusions to which it leads,—conclusions so remote from the interests and passions of this world, so beyond the sphere of our ordinary experience, and sometimes so apparently contradictory to it. Who, not instructed by revelation, can look on death, and feel assured of immortality? Upon this evidence alone religion has never been established among men. This alone has never solved the difficulties, nor quieted the doubts, of one anxious and philosophical inquirer. It has never defined the idea of God, as God is revealed by Christianity. It has never afforded any one a conviction of his being formed for eternal progress in improvement and happiness.

Our belief in God, then, as the Father of men, and our belief in our own immortality, truths which may well seem to be too vast for human comprehension if we were left to our unassisted powers, rest on our belief, that their evidence is the testimony of God through the mission and teachings of Jesus Christ. I say his mission ;— for his mission from God to men, if that fact be established, is alone a virtual revelation of the essential truths of religion. In this age of skepticism and false philosophy, it may be said that such a communication from God to men is hard to be conceived of or believed. Be it so ; but let it be remembered,

that on the decision of the question, whether such a communication have been made or not, depends the existence of religion among men ; — I do not say of superstition ; that flourishes rankly when its growth is not overshadowed and kept down by religion ; and still less do I speak of the temporary existence of religious mysticism, which is but another word for feelings, the result of education and habit, for which no reason can be given. Religion is either identified with Christianity, or subsists, in those who reject Christianity, through its still remaining power ; as an ever-green severed from its root may for a time retain the appearance of life.

The fundamental truths of religion, as taught by Christianity, necessarily imply the fact, or, in other words, involve the truth, that we shall always be subject to the moral government of God ; to that government which connects happiness with the observance of those laws that are essential to the nature of every moral being, and suffering with their transgression. Under this aspect the practical bearing of religion appears. Thus, when assured of the truths which it teaches, we know all that is necessary for our virtue and happiness. We know what may inspire the most glorious hopes, what may animate us in every effort for our own improvement and the service of our fellow-creatures ; we know all that we need to strengthen us for the endless course that lies before us.

WITH these truths settled in our minds, we may enter without anxiety on the examination of the many and opposite opinions, true and false, which different parties among Christians have connected with their faith in Christianity. In rejecting far the larger number of them as unfounded, an enlightened and well-informed man will perceive that he is

merely arriving at conclusions to which the progress of the human mind in knowledge and in correct modes of thinking has been gradually conducting us ; and that this progress, while it has undermined those errors, has tended equally to confirm the evidence of the essential principles of religion. He will do honor to his predecessors, who, without discerning all the truth, toiled and suffered in opening the way to it. He will not regard himself as superior to those through whose labors his own intellect has been formed, because through their assistance he has advanced somewhat farther than they had done. He will not fancy, that in the present age there has been a great outbreak of wisdom, from some hitherto unknown source, which is to sweep away all that has been established and revered. Nor in his mind will pernicious errors and essential truths be so bound together by his prejudices, that he cannot free himself from the former without loosening the latter from their hold.

Far from it. Every truth concerning our religion and its evidences is connected with and confirms every other ; and in removing an error we are establishing a truth. Then only may we hope that the evidences of Christianity will be allowed their full weight, and the efficacy of its doctrines be obstructed only by the imperfections and passions essential to our nature, when it shall be presented as it is, separate from all the erroneous opinions and false doctrines that have been connected with it. As one truth confirms another, so one error gives birth to another, often producing a numerous brood ; and the system into which any important error enters as an essential part becomes either corrupted throughout, or inconsistent with itself.

THESE observations will not be regarded as out of place,

when it is perceived that the inquiry on which we are about to enter leads to conclusions different from the opinions which have been professed by the generality of Christians ; though, unquestionably, the considerations on which those conclusions are founded have presented themselves to the minds of a great portion of intelligent believers.

I WILL venture to add a word or two more, having somewhat of a personal bearing. It seems to me a weighty offence against society to advance and maintain opinions on any important subject, especially any subject connected with religion, without carefully weighing them, and without feeling assured, as far as may be, that we shall find no reason to change our belief. I may be excused, therefore, for mentioning that the substance of what follows was originally committed to writing more than ten years ago (in the summer of 1831), and that I have not since found occasion to make any essential change in my conclusions.

SECTION II.

On the Evidences and the Design of the Jewish Dispensation.

THE belief that Moses was an inspired messenger of God follows from our belief in the divine origin of Christianity. He was, we suppose, miraculously commissioned to give to the Jews a knowledge of God, as the Maker and Governor of all things, and such other just conceptions of him as they were capable of receiving ; and to teach them to regard themselves as having been separated from the rest of men, by having been called in a peculiar manner to

worship and serve him. Beside the attestation to the divine origin of the Jewish dispensation furnished by Christianity, there are independent proofs of it, to which, without dwelling upon them at length, it may be worth while to advert.

WHEN we consider what the Jews were in other respects, the simple, direct knowledge which they possessed of God, as the sole Maker and Governor of the Universe, presenting so striking a contrast to the mythology of the most enlightened portion of the ancient world, affords the strongest confirmation of what they asserted, that its source was a divine revelation. This appears more clearly, when we reflect, that the idea of God was not with them a matter of speculation among a few philosophers, but formed the fundamental doctrine of their popular faith. The mere fact, likewise, of their most extraordinary belief, that they had been separated from all other nations by being called to worship Him, admits, apparently, of no other solution than that their belief was true. The high and just representations of the Deity, the exalted language of piety, and the noble and enlightened views of duty, which we find in the Scriptures of the Jews, when compared with what appears in other portions of those Scriptures, with the prevailing character of the Jews themselves, and with that of other ancient nations, can, as far as we are able to discern, be referred only to the deep influences of a divine revelation upon their minds. We perceive these influences in the formation of poetical writings of a kind to which nothing similar can be produced. They are compositions of the most marked religious character, altogether unlike the poetry of other ancient nations. The individuals addressed are throughout regarded under one aspect, as distinguished

from all other men by the peculiar relation in which they stand towards God. In the more eminent of these works, in those, for example, which have been ascribed to Isaiah, we perceive that the powerful mind, the strong feelings, and splendid imagination of the writer had been thoroughly wrought upon by religious convictions, which we cannot reasonably ascribe to the unaided progress of the human intellect among the Jews. Looking to the time when that people were already in possession of those wonderful books, we have to cast our view back to a period lighted only by a few gleams of authentic history. Here, we see men collecting in groups to listen to the poems of Homer, in which the objects of their worship are pictured with the vices and passions of the gross and ferocious chieftains of the age; there, we behold the gigantic monuments which Egyptian superstition had raised to its monster gods; all around is the darkness and error of polytheism, in one form or other, except where a small people rises distinctly to view, separate from the rest of mankind; a people of which there are now no famous monuments but its own continued existence and its sacred writings. Among the Jews, long before Socrates would have taught the Athenians the goodness and providence of the gods, there was a familiar conception of God; and their prophets could thus address them: —

“Have ye not known? Have ye not heard? Jehovah is the eternal God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He fains not, neither is weary. There is no searching of his understanding.”

“Thus says Jehovah, the King of Israel, I am the first, and I am the last, and beside me there is no God.”

“Let the wicked man forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to Jehovah, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

"For your thoughts are not my thoughts, nor your ways my ways, says Jehovah.

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

They who habitually expressed these and corresponding conceptions of the Supreme Being believed that they had derived them from express revelation; and there appears no good reason for doubting the correctness of their belief.

But it is not merely in the more remarkable portions of Hebrew poetry, that we find conceptions which we can account for only by referring them to a divine revelation. The Jews have left us a large collection of books, most of them in existence five centuries before Christ, throughout which, with the exception of two (the Song of Solomon, so called, and the Book of Esther), there runs a constant recognition of the being, providence, and moral government of God. The Old Testament, so insulated from all other productions of the human mind in ancient times, presents a great phenomenon in the intellectual history of our race. We may explain it at once, if we admit the divine origin of the Jewish religion; and what other solution but this can be offered?

THERE is another striking consideration. We can discern nothing but the fact, that the religion of the Jews had been confirmed to them by indisputable evidence, as a revelation from God, which could have wrought in their minds such an invincible conviction of its truth as to have preserved them a distinct people from a period beyond any connected and authentic records of profane history to the present day. In maintaining their faith they were for more than twenty centuries exposing themselves to the outrages

of Heathens and Christians; — to a persecution which even now has not everywhere subsided. Driven from their native soil, scattered among enemies, insulted, trampled upon, cruelly wronged, they have still clung to their religion, the cause of their sufferings, with inveterate constancy. From an antiquity which would be shrouded in darkness, were not a dim light cast upon it by their own history, this small people has flowed down an unmingled stream amid the stormy waves of the world. For a phenomenon so marvellous it is idle to assign any ordinary causes. One cause alone explains it. We must regard it as an inexplicable wonder, or we must believe that this people were, as they profess, separated from the rest of men by God, and this in a manner so evident, solemn, and effectual, that the ineffaceable belief of the fact has been transmitted from generation to generation, as an essential characteristic of the race.

Thus we perceive, that, besides the attestation of Christianity to its truth, the Jewish dispensation has independent evidence of its own; evidence which, so intimate is the connection between them, is reflected on Christianity itself.

If it be asked, what was the design of the Jewish dispensation, the answer seems to be, that its main, I do not say its sole, purpose was to serve as a groundwork for Christianity. Supposing that no nation like the Jews had existed, and that polytheism had prevailed throughout the world, a messenger from God, such as Jesus Christ, must have had no small difficulty to encounter on the very threshold of his ministry, in making his character and office understood by men ignorant of God. If he had appeared, for instance, at Athens or Rome, the very annunciation

of his claims to authority would have been a sudden and strange attack on the whole established system of religion. A new and vast conception, that of God, must have been formed in the minds of men, before they could have a notion of the peculiar office of him who addressed them. When we look at the state of either city, it seems scarcely possible that he should have been able to collect an audience, except of such as might have flocked to him as an extraordinary magician or theurgist. If we imagine him to have been listened to by some with deference, as a religious teacher, yet how large a portion of such hearers would have confounded the idea of the Supreme Being, *to whom there is nothing similar or second*, with that of Jupiter, to whom, in a very limited sense, and in the language of poetical flattery, they had been accustomed to apply such expressions; and how many might have mistaken the messenger himself for *Mercury, or some other god, come down in the likeness of a man*.^{*} There would have been no preparation for his advent, no expectation of it, no previous conception of its nature. It would have been an insulated, incomprehensible event, connected with nothing in their history or their former belief. The ground would not have been cleared for exhibiting before mankind the marvellous transactions of such a ministry as that of Christ.

THIS view of the important purpose of the Jewish dispensation may further tend to assure us of its divine origin. But to maintain that Moses was a minister of God is one thing, and to maintain that he was the author of the Pentateuch is another. So far is the truth of either proposition

^{*} Acts xiv. 11, 12.

from being involved in that of the other, that, in order to render it evident that Moses was from God, it may be necessary to prove that the books which profess to contain a history of his ministry were not written by him, and do not afford an authentic account of it. Whether this be so or not may appear in some degree from what follows, in which I shall examine the probability of the supposition that these books were written by Moses.

SECTION III.

On the Historical Evidence respecting the Authorship of the Pentateuch.

IN determining whether an ancient work is to be ascribed to a particular author, we must begin with the historical evidence.

RESPECTING the Pentateuch, we will first consider *the evidence that relates to its history subsequent to the return of the Jews from their Captivity* (B. C. 536). This evidence is sufficient to render it probable that it was in existence somewhere about a century after that event. The date that has been assigned for Ezra's reading "the Law of Moses" to the people, as related in the eighth chapter of Nehemiah, is the year 454 before Christ.* "Ezra," says Prideaux, "reformed the whole state of the Jewish Church according to the Law of Moses, in which he was excellently learned, and settled it upon that bottom upon

* That is, about a thousand years, as commonly reckoned, after the death of Moses, B. C. 1451.

which it afterwards stood to the time of our Saviour." * This statement expresses what has been the common belief on the subject. Perhaps too much agency may be ascribed in it to Ezra alone. But it seems not improbable that within his lifetime the Jews who had returned to Palestine were formed anew into a state, on the basis, generally, of the Levitical Law. Ezra, it is said, read the Book of the Law of Moses to the people. But there is nothing to identify this Book of the Law with the whole five books of the Pentateuch. Admitting that the Levitical Law existed in all its extent in the time of Ezra, yet we cannot infer from this fact alone that it was then incorporated with the historical portion of the Pentateuch. If this union, however, did not then exist, it was probably effected not long after. The Septuagint translation of the Pentateuch was made in the first half of the third century before Christ. The origin of the Samaritan Pentateuch (that which was used by the Samaritans, written in their own alphabetical characters) we may, with Prideaux and others,† refer to the time when a temple was built on Mount Gerizim, and the temple-worship introduced among the Samaritans by Manasseh and his associates, as related by Josephus. This, according to Josephus,‡ was during the reign of Alexander, about 330 years before Christ. Some, however, have as-

* Prideaux's Connection of the History of the Old and New Testament, Part I. Book 5. Vol. II. p. 460. 10th Ed. 1729.

† Prideaux's Connection, Part I. Book 6. Vol. II. p. 597, seqq. — Simon, *Histoire Crit. du V. T.* Liv. I. c. 10. — Idem, *Critique de la Bibliothèque et des Prolégomènes de M. Du Pin*, Tom. III. p. 148, seqq. — Van Dale, *De Origine et Progressu Idololatriæ*, pp. 75–82, p. 681, seqq. — Gesenius, *De Pentateucho Samaritano*, § 2.

‡ *Antiq. Jud. Lib. XI. cc. 7, 8.*

signed to it an earlier date, namely, about the beginning of the fourth century before Christ.*

But, if the Pentateuch existed in the time of Ezra, or not long after, this fact alone does not afford any proof that it was then ascribed to Moses as its author. To this point we shall hereafter advert. But we may here observe, that the Pentateuch itself, while it assumes to be an authentic account of the deeds and laws of Moses, puts forward no claim to being considered as his work. Though he were not regarded as its author in the time of Ezra, it might be readily received by the Jews as bearing the character of an authentic document.

The fact that "the Law" was ascribed to Moses does not prove that the authorship of the Pentateuch was ascribed to him. But that he was generally regarded by the Jews as its author, about the commencement of our era, appears from Philo, the writers of the New Testament, and Josephus. The prevalence of this opinion at that time shows that it was not of recent origin; but affords no ground for determining its antiquity within any precise limits.

We have no further knowledge of the history of the Pentateuch between the time of the return of the Jews to Palestine and the commencement of the Christian era, an interval of more than five centuries, except that it was included in the class of books which at the last-mentioned date we find considered by the Jews as sacred books, or, in other words, included in the "Canon," as it is called, of the Old Testament. Respecting this canon there are also some traditions of the Jews which deserve notice. We

* Compare Josephus with Nehemiah xiii. 28, and see Prideaux's *Connection*, Part I. Book 6. Vol. II. p. 588, seqq.

will next attend, therefore, to its history, and to these traditions.

From an age considerably before the time of Josephus, as is evident from a passage in that writer, and from other considerations, on which our subject does not require us to dwell, the books *now regarded by Protestants* as forming the Old Testament * have been recognized by the Jews as sacred books. But this canon was not formed, or, in other words, it was not settled what books should be classed together as possessing in some respects a common, I do not say a sacred, character, till after the return of the Jews to Palestine. This is evident from the fact of its containing books about which there is no controversy that they were not written till after that event, namely, the Chronicles, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and those of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Of the history of the formation of the canon we are wholly ignorant. In the reign of Josiah, a little before the commencement of the Captivity, it appears, from a narrative in the Book of Kings, that the Jews generally were ignorant of the existence of a written copy of their national laws, before the discovery, as represented, of such a copy in the Temple.† On their return, it is probable that a large majority of them, taken individually, were not ac-

* To these the Council of Trent (A. D. 1546) added, as of equal authority, all those books, and parts of books, which constitute the Apocrypha of our English Bibles, except the two Books of Esdras (Ezra), so called, and the Prayer of Manasseh. It is not here the place to give an account of the manner in which the more intelligent Roman Catholics explain, or evade, this decree of the last General Council, — the last which will ever be held.

† 2 Kings xxii.

quainted with all those writings of the Old Testament which were then extant. Some, perhaps, knew of one work and some of another. Such being the case, we have no credible information respecting the manner in which these books, together with the others afterwards classed with them, were brought into notice, and finally came to be considered as the sacred books of the nation. But though we have no direct evidence on this subject, we have perhaps ground for a probable conjecture. These books are very diverse in their character. The contents of many of them, as, for example, Ruth, the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon, Ezra, and Nehemiah (to mention no others), are such as not to afford any very obvious reason or occasion for ascribing to them a sacred character. The admission of these books into the canon is to be viewed in connection with the fact, that no ancient Hebrew work not included in it is known to have existed at the time when the canon may be supposed to have been completed. Hence we may infer that this class of books was formed upon *no principle of selection*. It is probable that it comprehended *all* the remains of the ancient literature of the nation; all books — that is to say, all books intended for general use, and of any value or notoriety — which had escaped the ravages of war and the injuries of time. They had all a common character, as, with the exception of the use of the Chaldee language in portions of two of those of latest date, Ezra and Daniel, they were all written in the Hebrew language, a language which had become obsolete. Far the greater portion of them were of the highest national interest, as relating either to the religion and laws of the nation, or to its history, which was so intimately connected with the national religion. Others of a different kind had, or were supposed to have, sufficient

claims to be classed with them ; as the Proverbs and the Song of Solomon, the latter of which, and many of the former, were ascribed to the most powerful monarch of the nation, the wisest of men. We perceive at once how a sacred character might be assigned to many of these books ; and it is easy to understand how such a character should, in process of time, be extended to all.

We are ignorant how far the preservation of these books, and their final reception as sacred writings, were the result of a general estimate of their value, or how much was effected by the care and efforts of some leading individual or individuals. One fact, however, respecting them is evident. Some of them must have been compiled after the composition of the parts, or writings, of which they are respectively formed ; as the book of Psalms, the book of Proverbs (which consists of several collections of those ascribed to Solomon, together with those ascribed to Agar, and those, as is said, of the mother of a King Lemuel, who is not elsewhere mentioned*), and the works of some of the Prophets, which consist of separate and unconnected prophecies or poems. In the compilation of the latter works there is little doubt that errors have been committed ; and that compositions have been ascribed to some of the Prophets, particularly to Isaiah, of which they were not the authors. The book of Nehemiah, likewise, was originally united with that of Ezra, as forming together with it one work, to which the name of the latter was given ; and it appears that Ezra was regarded as in some sense the author of both. Each of these two books, moreover, appears to be a compilation, inartificially put together, so as to occasion historical and chronological difficulties ; and

* See Proverbs i. 1 ; x. 1 ; xxv. 1 ; xxx. 1 ; xxxi. 1.

there are portions of each which cannot be referred to the individual whose name it bears.

It has been commonly said by modern writers, that Ezra, after the return from the Captivity, revised and re-edited the books of the Old Testament; that is, as the proposition must be understood, those books which were extant at the time of his performing this work. The statement rests on a Jewish tradition. But this tradition first appears at much too late a period to be regarded as any evidence of the fact. It, moreover, presents itself in a shape obviously fabulous. It is not mentioned by Philo or Josephus; nor is it found in the Talmud. There is a passage in what is called the Second Book of Esdras (Ezra), a book of uncertain origin and date, published among the Apocrypha of the English Bible, which appears to be founded on it. In this passage the Law is said to have been burnt, so that no man knew the things that had been done by God; and Ezra is represented as proposing, through the assistance of the Holy Spirit, to write over again what had been written in the Law.* The tradition in question is to be traced principally in the works of the Christian fathers, who undoubtedly derived it from the Jews. The earliest writer by whom it is distinctly mentioned is Irenæus, who lived six centuries after the time of Ezra. He says, that, "the Scriptures having been destroyed" at the time of the Captivity, God "inspired Ezra to put in order all the words of the preceding prophets, and to restore to the people the Law which was given by Moses."† A similar account is found in Clement of Alex-

* 2 Esdras xiv. 21, seqq.

† Cont. Hæres. Lib. III. c. 21. § 2. p. 216.

andria. The Scriptures being destroyed, he says, Ezra was inspired to renew them, and to make them known again to the people.* Tertullian says, that "it is well known, that, after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, the whole body of the Jewish writings was restored anew by Ezra."† Chrysostom seems to have been unwilling to admit the marvellous part of the story in its full extent; for, though he speaks of the books of the Jewish Scriptures as having been burnt, he appears not to have been disposed to believe that they were utterly destroyed. God, he says, who had inspired Moses and the Prophets, "inspired another admirable man, Ezra, to set them forth, and put them together *from their remains*."‡ Theodoret, on the other hand, represents the books as having been entirely destroyed, and restored by Ezra, through divine inspiration.§ The tradition which appears under these forms shows that the Jews, at the time when they transmitted their ancient books to Christians, were ignorant of the history of them, and had substituted fables for facts.

This is further made evident by a tradition preserved in the Talmud concerning their canonical books.|| "Moses," it is there said, "wrote his book, the section concerning Balaam,¶ and Job. Joshua wrote his book, and eight vers-

* Stromat. I. § 21. p. 392. § 22. p. 410.

† De Cultu Feminarum, § 3. p. 151.

‡ Homil. VIII. in Epist. ad Hebræos.

§ Interpret. in Cant. Cantic. Opp. I. 984, 985.

|| Vid. Wolfii Biblioth. Rabbin. Tom. II. pp. 2, 3.

¶ "The section concerning Balaam, or of Balaam." These words have been differently understood by the later Jewish commentators. Some suppose that Moses wrote a separate account of Balaam, apart from the Pentateuch. Others, that the account found in the Pentateuch (Numbers xxii. - xxiv.) was translated by Moses from a book written by Balaam himself. See Fabricii Codex Pseudepigraph. V. T. Tom. I. pp. 809, 810.

es which are in the Law.* Samuel wrote his book, the book of Judges, and Ruth. David wrote the book of Psalms with the assistance [*per manus*] of ten of the Elders, Adam, Melchisedec, Abraham, Moses, Heman, Jeduthun, Asaph, and the three sons of Korah.† Jeremiah wrote his book, the Book of Kings, and the Lamentations. Hezekiah [the king of Judah], with his ministers, *wrote* ‡ the prophecies of Isaiah, the Proverbs, the Canticles, and Ecclesiastes. The men of the Great Synagogue § *wrote* Ezekiel, the twelve Minor Prophets, Daniel, and Esther. Ezra wrote his book || and the Chronicles.”

* This seems to refer to what is said in Joshua xxiv. 26.

† The Jews ascribed the ninety-second Psalm to Adam, the hundred and tenth to Melchisedec, the ninetyeth to Moses, whose name appears in the inscription to it in our English Bible, and others to the different individuals mentioned, whose names, with the exception of that of Abraham, are likewise found in the present inscriptions of the Psalms.

‡ This word *wrote*, here, and where it is again Italicized, appears to be used very loosely, and in different senses, in respect to the different books mentioned. It is to be understood, perhaps, in reference to some of these books, as meaning that the persons spoken of committed to writing what before had been orally preserved; and, in respect to others, that they brought together the different parts of which the book is formed; that they compiled it. In reference to the book of Esther, it may mean that they composed it.

The notion that Hezekiah, with his associates, was engaged in this work, was undoubtedly derived from Proverbs xxv. 1. “These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, copied out.”

§ The Great Synagogue, according to a fiction of the Jewish Rabbis, was a council of one hundred and twenty men, over whom Ezra presided, and who assisted him in the reestablishment of the polity and religion of the nation after the return of the Jews to Palestine. See Buxtorf's Tiberias, Cap. X. p. 93, seqq.

|| By “his book,” as already mentioned, is meant not only that which passes under the name of Ezra, but likewise that ascribed to Nehemiah.

Thus far we have found nothing which bears the character of historical evidence to show that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch. We have found no proof, even that such was the opinion of the Jews in the time of Ezra. Nor, indeed, have we found any decisive proof that the Pentateuch was in existence in his time; for we have no good reason for believing, that, when the Law of Moses is spoken of, the Pentateuch is necessarily intended. But, could it be proved that the Pentateuch, in the time of Ezra, was believed by the Jews to be the work of Moses, we should still be a thousand years distant from the time of Moses; and an opinion respecting the authorship of a book existing at a period a thousand years distant from the time of its supposed writer cannot be regarded as historical evidence.

It is clear, therefore, from the nature of the case, that there exists no historical evidence that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, unless it may be found in some of the other books which compose the Jewish canon. No other documents make such an approach toward the time of Moses as may entitle them to any weight in support of the supposition that he was the author of the Pentateuch. We will, then, next consider *the historical evidence which has been thought to be furnished by the Old Testament itself.*

In the other books of the Old Testament there are references to various narratives and laws now found in the Pentateuch, and these references have been considered as proving that the Pentateuch was in existence before their composition, and consequently as furnishing indirect proof that it was written by Moses. But such references afford no ground for these conclusions; for, if the Pentateuch

were not the work of Moses, it was undoubtedly, in great part, a compilation (derived from ancient authorities, written or oral, or both) which was made for the purpose of embodying and preserving the traditions and national laws of the Jews; and there is no reason why these traditions and laws should not have been referred to as well before its existence as after.

In the Book of Joshua there is repeated mention of "the Book of the Law of Moses"; and hence it has been argued that we have evidence of the earliest date to justify us in ascribing the Pentateuch to Moses. But such is not the case. We must here, as elsewhere, keep in mind that there is nothing to identify "the Book of the Law of Moses," or, in other words, a written collection of the laws ascribed to Moses, with the whole Pentateuch, previously to the time when it may be proved, by wholly independent evidence, that those laws were to be found in the last four books of the Pentateuch, and that the whole five had become so connected together as to be designated by the common title of "the Book of the Law." But, though it may be well to keep this consideration in view, yet it is not important in its bearing on the case before us. The main fact to be at present attended to is, that there is no evidence to show when or by whom the Book of Joshua was written. Its history and age are at least as uncertain as those of the five books ascribed to Moses; and it is so connected with them, and liable to so many common or similar objections, that its authority must stand or fall together with that of the Pentateuch.*

* It is remarkable that the references in Joshua to a Book of the Law, when taken together, are of such a character as rather to throw discredit on the work in which they are found, than to serve to con-

In the seventh verse of the fortieth Psalm, ascribed to David, there is mention of a book which has been supposed

firm the credit of any other. In the first chapter (vv. 7, 8) Joshua is represented as being enjoined by the Lord "to do according to all the Law which Moses commanded," and "to meditate day and night on the Book of the Law." Here, by "the Book of the Law," it may seem that the writer intended either the whole Pentateuch, or the book of Deuteronomy alone. I mention the last supposition, because there is no clear reference in Joshua to any book of the Pentateuch except Deuteronomy. If, however, this book alone were referred to as the Book of the Law, it would prove the writer's ignorance or disregard of the four other books of the Pentateuch, and afford proof that in his day they were either not in existence, or not attributed to Moses. It may be assumed, therefore, that the whole Pentateuch is meant. In the last chapter (v. 26) it is said, that Joshua wrote "these words" (it is not clear what words are intended) in "the Book of the Law of God." Here again it may seem that some copy either of Deuteronomy or of the whole Pentateuch is intended. In the eighth chapter, after the account of the taking of Ai, Joshua is immediately represented as proceeding, with the whole nation of the Israelites, to Mount Ebal in the centre of the enemy's country (fearless of his foes, and unmolested by them), and there erecting an altar according to the directions in "the Book of the Law of Moses." (v. 31.) The directions referred to are in the twenty-seventh chapter of Deuteronomy; and "the Book of the Law of Moses" must have the same meaning here as the corresponding terms in the passages before quoted. But the narrative immediately goes on to say (vv. 32, 34, 35), that Joshua inscribed on the stones of the altar, in the presence of the children of Israel, "a copy of the Law of Moses"; and "afterwards read all the words of the Law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel." Here, as it is incredible that Joshua should have engraved, or written, the whole Pentateuch on the stones of the altar, it has been imagined by some that only the book of Deuteronomy was intended; but this is also incredible. Others, therefore, have supposed that "the Law of Moses" here means only the blessings and cursings recorded in the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth

to be the Pentateuch. The verse is thus given in the Common Version : —

chapters of Deuteronomy. But this is inconsistent with the use of the term, not merely elsewhere, but, as we have seen, in this account itself; in which it is said, that what was done was done according to the directions in "the Book of the Law of Moses." Those blessings and curses are nowhere else called "the Law of Moses," nor could they be so with propriety. They were the sanctions of the Law, not the Law itself. Besides, it is evident that Joshua read to the people the same which he had inscribed on the altar. Now, according to the directions in Deuteronomy (xxvii. 14), it was not his business, but that of the Levites, to pronounce those blessings and curses. Others, therefore, have thought that by "the Law of Moses," as here used, the Ten Commandments only are meant. But, besides that this supposition, like that last mentioned, gives a meaning to the term inconsistent with its common use, and especially with its use immediately before, it may be added, that, if the writer had only intended to say that Joshua read the Ten Commandments, he would hardly have insisted so strongly upon his having read the whole Law, omitting not a word.

The relation, therefore, appears not like the history of a real event, but like the narrative of one who did not well consider what he was writing.

But this account in the Book of Joshua is to be compared with the directions which Moses is represented to have given, in Deuteronomy xxvii. 2-8. On these directions it is founded, and they are liable to similar objections with the account itself. Moses, it is said, ordered, that, after the Israelites had passed the Jordan, they should "set up great stones, and plaster them with plaster," "and write upon the stones *all the words of this Law*, very plainly." By "all the words of this Law," it is clear, from a comparison of many passages in Deuteronomy in which these or equivalent terms are used, that the author or compiler of that book could have meant *nothing less* than the whole body of laws contained in it. On the supposition that the book of Deuteronomy originally formed a part of the Pentateuch, and was written by Moses in connection with the other four books, the terms in question must denote the whole Pentateuch. For Moses, it is said (xxxi. 24-26), "made an end of writing *the words of this Law* in a

"Then, said I, Lo, I come : in the volume of the book * it is written of me."

The meaning of the words is uncertain, and they have been variously rendered and explained. But the passage, however understood, would, at most, prove only that in the time of David (if he were its writer), that is, according to the common computation, about four centuries after the death of Moses, the Jews possessed some book which they believed to teach what God had prescribed to them. There is no evidence that this book was the Pentateuch. On the contrary, it seems altogether improbable that it was any book inculcating the ceremonial law of the Jews, as that is laid down in the Pentateuch, considering how the passage is introduced and connected. Such, on the contrary, is the unqualified manner in which it is asserted that sacrifices were not required by God, that the passage may be considered as affording strong proof, that, at the time when it was written, the Pentateuch did not exist.

book," and gave it to the Levites to be deposited by the side of the ark of the covenant, for a witness against the nation. Had he written the whole of the Pentateuch, he would not have separated the book of Deuteronomy from it to be thus preserved alone, as containing the words of the Law. We cannot on that supposition believe that the book which he gave to the Levites to be thus scrupulously cared for was not the whole Pentateuch, with the exception, of course, of those portions of it which he could not have written. That it was the whole Pentateuch has generally been admitted, or contended for, by those who have regarded the Pentateuch as the work of Moses.

* The words should be rendered, "in the scroll of the book," meaning simply "the book." The periphrasis (which was perhaps used as a more solemn expression) is founded on the manner in which books were anciently written, in the form of a roll.

“ In sacrifice and oblation thou hast no pleasure :
 Mine ears thou hast opened : *
 Burnt-offering and sin-offering thou dost not desire :
 Therefore I said, Lo, I come :
 In the scroll of the book it is written of me :
 O my God ! to do thy will is my delight,
 And thy law dwells in my heart.” †

In the scroll of the book it is written of me : this is a verbal rendering ; and in these words it may seem most probable that the Psalmist did not refer to any book, properly speaking, but to that book in which, according to an imagination common from his day to our own, God is conceived of as recording both what he sees, and more especially what he wills and purposes, — the book, as it may be called, of the Divine Mind. ‡ He may be understood as saying, Lo ! I come, as thou hast written, that is, as thou hast purposed, concerning me.

With the exception of the passages that have been referred to in the Book of Joshua, there is no express mention of a Book of the Law ascribed to Moses in any writing of the Old Testament which has been supposed to be of an age prior to the Captivity. § No such book is mentioned in the

* That is, Thou hast made me hear thy voice ; Thou hast enabled me to understand thy will.

† This version varies a little from that of the Rev. Dr. Noyes ; whose Translations of the Psalms, of Job, and of the Prophets are, I believe, well entitled to the reputation they enjoy, among those to whom they are known, of being the best in our language.

‡ See Psalm lvi. 8 ; lxix. 28 ; lxxxvii. 6 ; cxxxix. 16. Isaiah iv. 3 ; xxxiv. 16 ; lxxv. 6. Daniel vii. 10 ; xii. 1. Exod. xxxiii. 32, 33.

§ The Captivity commenced, according to the common computation, in the year 606 before Christ, that is, about eight cen-

Books, or rather Book, of Samuel. By the Prophets, the public teachers of religion among the Jews, such a book is nowhere spoken of. No evidence can be drawn from their writings of the existence of the Pentateuch, or of any book ascribed to Moses as its author. The fact is important as regards our present inquiry. It amounts to more than a mere absence of proof that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch. Considering that the Prophets were the public teachers of religion, the fact that there is no distinct notice in their writings of a book ascribed to the great Lawgiver of the nation, a book which must have been the fundamental document in all that concerned religion, creates a strong suspicion that no such book was in existence, or, as regards the Prophets after the Captivity, that no such book had been handed down with the authority of antiquity. What should we think of a series of Christian teachers, from whose works no satisfactory evidence could be deduced of the existence of the New Testament?

We come, then, to the Books of Kings, or rather the Book of Kings, as it should be called, there being no ground for the division either of Samuel, the Kings, or the Chronicles, into two books. Each was reckoned in the Hebrew canon but as one work. The Book of Kings (to speak of

turies and a half after the death of Moses. — I except, in the sentence above, the Book of Joshua, because that *has been supposed to have been written before the Captivity, and even by Joshua himself.* Nothing can well be more untenable than the latter supposition. The fact, that it was ascribed to him by the same Jewish tradition which has assigned their supposed authors to other parts of the Old Testament, serves to show how little credit that tradition is entitled to. We have no knowledge by whom the Book of Joshua was written. Its composition was apparently subsequent to that of Deuteronomy.

it in the singular number) is brought down to the thirty-seventh year of the Captivity,* about nine centuries, as commonly computed, after the death of Moses. It is unimportant, as regards our present inquiry, whether it was written, or rather compiled, during the continuance, or after the termination, of the Captivity. Any testimony in this work, did such testimony exist, to the supposed fact, that Moses wrote the Pentateuch nine hundred years before, would be of no weight. But the work contains no testimony to this effect. We find words ascribed to David, as his dying charge to Solomon, in which he exhorts him "to keep all the statutes, commands, decrees, and ordinances of the Lord, as written in the Law of Moses."† The writer speaks in his own person of "what is written in the Law of Moses," quoting a passage to be found only in Deuteronomy.‡ And he gives an account of the discovery in the Temple, by the high-priest Hilkiah, of "the Book of the Law," during the reign of Josiah § (B. C. 624, as computed). These and other passages, in which "the Law," or "the Law of Moses," is mentioned, prove, that, before the composition of the Book of the Kings, the Jews possessed a written code of laws which bore the name of Moses. But, without supposing this code to have been written by Moses, we cannot doubt, that, by whomever compiled, it included all those precepts and laws which were given, or which the Jews believed to have been given, by him. As many as could by any plausible tradition, or perhaps by any plausible invention, be ascribed to him, would be so ascribed. Additional laws might be represented as mere deductions from

* 2 Kings xxv. 27.

† 1 Kings ii. 3.

‡ 2 Kings xiv. 6. Comp. Deut. xxiv. 16.

§ 2 Kings xxii. 8, seqq.

those of which he was the real or reputed author. Hence it is easy to understand why a code of Jewish laws, whenever compiled, should be called the Law of Moses. But the existence of such a code does not prove that the five books of the Pentateuch were written by Moses.

On the contrary, it seems impossible plausibly to reconcile the narrative just referred to, of the discovery in the Temple of a copy of "the Book of the Law," with the supposition, that this book was the Pentateuch, and that the Pentateuch was written by Moses. It is plain, that, according to that account, the book was before unknown to Josiah, a religious prince, to his secretary Shaphan, and to the high-priest Hilkiah. It cannot, therefore, be supposed that the existence of such a book was known to any of the higher officers of the state, or to any of the principal priests; and if, during a religious reign which had continued for eighteen years, it was unknown to them, we cannot reasonably suppose that it was known to any one, or, to say the least, that it was generally known. But the Pentateuch, if written by Moses, was the most venerable and valuable possession of the nation, and an object of the highest interest, not only to every religious man, but to every Jew not destitute of the love of his country, or a sense of the true honor of his people. It was the work in which the Lawgiver of the nation, the messenger of God, had related the wonderful events of his own ministry, and announced those ordinances which God had appointed through him. It was not merely the proper foundation of the religion and polity of the state, it was in itself the national code of laws, civil and ceremonial. It is difficult to believe that such a book should have been so forgotten. It had survived the long period (about three centuries, as commonly supposed) of anarchy, barbarism, and subjugation, following the death of Joshua. If

it had ever been recognized and honored as the work of Moses, it must have been so in the age of Solomon. From his reign to that of Josiah was a period of somewhere about three centuries and a half. According to the history, the kings of Judah, during the larger part of this time, maintained the national religion. If these kings knew and regarded an express ordinance contained in the Pentateuch,* they had each made a copy of it. If they knew and obeyed another requisition, they had caused it to be read to the assembled people every Sabbatical year.† We have, indeed, good reason to believe that this had not been done; for, as we shall hereafter have occasion to remark, the Sabbatical years had not been observed. But had the Pentateuch been in existence and regarded as the work of Moses, it cannot be supposed, that, during the long periods when the kings of Judah "did right in the sight of the Lord," they took no effectual means of making known to the people the fundamental book of their religion, and the code of laws which they were bound to obey; or that there were not many among the priests, the prophets, and the better sort of the nation, who were always interested in its study and preservation. We may compare the period of less than four centuries between the reigns of Solomon and Josiah with the period of fourteen centuries which intervened between the destruction of Jerusalem and the first printing of the Pentateuch. During this time, the Jews, though scattered among their enemies, and everywhere trampled down by hatred and cruelty, preserved, even amid the barbarism of the dark ages, copies of what they then considered as the work of Moses, though few only of their number were able to read it. But, according to the narrative in the

* Deuteronomy xvii. 18.

† Ibid. xxxi. 10, 11.

Book of Kings, if we suppose it to relate to the Pentateuch, and suppose the Pentateuch to be the work of Moses, it would appear that this work, carrying with it the authority of God, and of the highest interest to the nation, had been so little valued, and had fallen into such oblivion, that, but for an accident, or an interposition of Providence, it might have perished from men's knowledge; and this, though other works written before the Captivity were preserved, and though there had been for two centuries a succession of prophets in Judah and Israel, whose works escaped such neglect.

It follows, therefore, as I conceive, that, whatever were the book produced in the reign of Josiah, it could not have been the Pentateuch, if the Pentateuch were the work of Moses. But, if it were any other book, the Pentateuch was not then in existence, or not considered as the work of Moses; for, had it been in existence and so considered, no other book would have been entitled "the Book of the Law," and produced for the regulation of the national religion.

The book actually produced was, according to the narrative concerning it, a body of laws, professedly resting on divine authority. It may have been one of the documents afterwards made use of in the formation of the Pentateuch. Perhaps it was, as some have conjectured, the Book of Deuteronomy, or perhaps it was a book which afterwards served for the basis of that work. It was brought forward to aid the reformation from idolatry under Josiah; and the story of its being accidentally found in the Temple may be thought to have been what was considered a justifiable artifice, to account for the appearance of a book hitherto unknown.

IN tracing our course downward from Moses we have now arrived at the period of the reëstablishment of the Jews in Palestine, after the Captivity, the period to which we have before ascended. It is unnecessary to examine critically any supposed notices of the Pentateuch in the books of the Old Testament written after that event. We have seen, that, when the Book of Kings was written, a code of national laws was extant, ascribed to Moses; and those supposed notices prove nothing more.

ON reviewing the ground we have gone over, it may appear that no direct historical evidence exists that the Pentateuch was the work of Moses. But it may be said, that there is strong indirect evidence for this supposition, in the fact, that from the time of Moses the Levitical Law was regarded by the Jews as their national law; that its religious rites were observed by them, its festivals celebrated, and all its statutes considered as binding, except when the nation fell into sin and idolatry.

In such statements much is assumed which cannot be proved. It appears, that before the Captivity there was a temple at Jerusalem, and priests and Levites, and sacrifices, and other religious rites; but it does not appear that the Levitical Law had been, from the time of Moses, the national law of the Jews. On the contrary, there is much that is inconsistent with this supposition.

In proof of it we must not argue from books written after the return of the Jews to Palestine, when we may suppose the Pentateuch to have been in existence, and the Levitical Law to have been established. From the circumstances of the case, the evidence, direct or indirect, which they may seem to afford, is altogether questionable. I refer particu-

larly to the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Malachi, and the Chronicles. The compiler of the Chronicles, especially, seems to have given a strong coloring to the ancient history of his nation, derived from the feelings, customs, and institutions of his own age, for the purpose of recommending the Levitical Law to his countrymen by the supposed example and authority of their ancestors. His work appears to have been founded principally on the Books of Samuel and the Kings; or, to say the least, there is no probability, that, in the portion of his history coincident with what is contained in those books, he had any other authentic documents than what their authors possessed. But, in comparing the accounts in those books with the accounts in the Chronicles, we see at once how much the author of this later work has added concerning priests and Levites, and religious ceremonies. As a single illustration of the general character of his work, we may take the narrative of the removal of the ark by David to Jerusalem, in the thirteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth chapters of the First Book of Chronicles, as compared with the account in the sixth chapter of the Second Book of Samuel. In the Chronicles the priests and Levites play a principal part. In the Book of Samuel they do not appear at all. The ark is not borne by Levites, as it should have been, according to the Levitical Law, and, contrary to that Law, the sacrifices are offered, not by priests, but by David.*

* The character of the Book of Chronicles, as stated above, was first, I believe, distinctly pointed out and illustrated by De Wette, in his "Critical Essay on the Credibility of the Books of the Chronicles" (in German). Though one may be far from assenting to all that is said by De Wette, yet what is essential in his positions respecting

Without entering into any critical inquiry, but receiving the accounts of the earlier Jewish historians as they lie before us, it is evident, that, from the death of Joshua to the time when David proposed to erect a national temple (a period, as computed, of about four centuries), there could have been, consistently with the accounts in the Books of Judges and of Samuel, no regular observance of the Levitical Law by the Jewish nation. Nor in the interval between the time when Solomon fell into idolatry* and the time of the Captivity could this law have been uniformly respected by the Jews as their national law; considering the separation of the people into two kingdoms, which was contrary to it, and the frequent occurrence of idolatrous kings, during whose reigns it must, if it existed, have been in abeyance. In the time of Josiah, as we have seen, "the Book of the Law" was generally unknown; and the apparently accidental discovery of such a book (less than twenty years, as computed, before the commencement of the Captivity) is represented as a momentous event, leading to the reëstablishment of the national religion.

the Chronicles seems to be satisfactorily established; and if so, this work cannot be considered as trustworthy, where it varies from the earlier historians, or adds to their accounts.

In the first part of his Antiquities of the Jews, Josephus could have had no other good authority than the books of the Old Testament. His work, therefore, affords an example of the license with which a Jewish historian might remodel and add to the history of his countrymen; and we have no reason to be surprised, if we find a similar character in the earlier author of the Chronicles.

* Among the many similar facts which characterize the Book of Chronicles as a work adapted to the opinions and feelings of the Jews after the Captivity, when the Levitical Law was established, it may be observed that it omits all mention of the idolatry of Solomon.

It is to be observed, that these obvious facts are not adduced to disprove the antiquity of the Levitical Law ; they are only brought forward to show, that no proof of its being derived from Moses can be founded on the supposition, that it was the national law of the Jews from the time of Moses. Of this supposition no satisfactory evidence exists ; for, as has been remarked, we cannot rely on the historical books written after the Captivity, when the Levitical Law was in operation ; for these books were, to all appearance, conformed to the opinions and feelings of this later time. But there is not only a want of satisfactory evidence in proof of the supposition ; there is, beside the leading facts that have been mentioned, other direct evidence to the contrary, to which we will now advert.

The author of the Book of Kings relates, that after the discovery of "the Book of the Law," in the reign of Josiah, a passover was celebrated in Jerusalem, and adds :—"Such a passover had not been kept from the days of the Judges, who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah." * With the exception of what is found in the Pentateuch itself, this is the only mention of the keeping of a passover in any historical book of earlier date than the Chronicles ; nor is there in the Prophets who wrote before the Captivity any distinct allusion to what afterwards became the great national festival. If the writer of the Book of Kings meant to say, that so splendid a passover had not been celebrated before, not even in the days of Solomon, this would be almost equivalent to saying, that no passover had been celebrated at all. If his meaning were, that the rites of the ceremonial Law were more strictly observed than they had been before, the

* 2 Kings xxiii. 22.

remark must imply that they were then for the first time fully observed since the days of the Judges.

In the Book of Nehemiah, written more than a thousand years after the death of Moses, there is a mention of the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles ; * and, in speaking of it, the writer says, — “ Since the days of Joshua, the son of Nun, to that day, had not the children of Israel done so.” “ We see,” says the learned Joseph Mede,† “ how expressly this Feast of Tabernacles was commanded yearly to be observed. Nevertheless, which is past all belief, it was never kept, at least in this main circumstance of *dwell-ing in booths*, from the time of Joshua till after their return from captivity in the days of Nehemiah.” Le Clerc ‡ remarks, that “ this law [the law respecting the Feast of Tabernacles] was neither obscure nor hard to be observed. But, as I have often said, the laws of Moses were never accurately observed.” The national festivals, appointed by a ceremonial law, are of all its ordinances the least likely to be neglected.

The writer of the Book of Chronicles himself gives us to understand,§ that the seventy years of the Captivity answered to seventy Sabbatical years which had not been kept. If, as is implied in what is said, the Sabbatical year had not been observed for five centuries preceding the Captivity, we can hardly believe, that, at the late period when the Book of Chronicles was written, any evidence existed of its ever having been observed before the Captivity. With

* Nehemiah, ch. viii. Comp. Ezra iii. 4-6, which I suppose to relate to the same celebration.

† Discourse xlviii. Works, p. 268. Ed. 1679.

‡ Comment. in loc.

§ 2 Chron. xxxvi. 21.

the Sabbatical years the years of Jubilee were intimately connected, and if there were no Sabbatical years, we cannot reasonably suppose that there were any years of Jubilee. Yet the laws regarding the Sabbatical year and the Jubilee are among the most important of those concerning the rights of property, and, at the same time, are represented to have been intimately interwoven with the theocratical government of the Jews, as implying a periodical miracle.

According to a law in Leviticus,* it was enjoined, under a severe penalty, that sacrifices should be offered only where the Tabernacle was placed. According to another law in Deuteronomy,† after the Jews were established in Palestine, one place of national worship was to be designated, where alone sacrifices were to be offered. This one place was to be considered as the habitation of Jehovah, where alone the people were to seek him and come before him. These laws are apparently fundamental among those relating to the public worship. There is a narrative in the Book of Joshua,‡ according to which their obligation was recognized. But it does not appear elsewhere from the early Jewish history, extending down to the building of Solomon's temple, that such laws existed. On the contrary, altars were raised and sacrifices offered by holy men in various places, and in places where the Tabernacle was not; and such facts are related without censure by the historian.

Thus, for example. — In the first chapter of the First Book of Samuel we find the Tabernacle and the Ark, with Eli and his sons, at Shiloh. Here was the house of Jehovah. The Ark being taken, and afterwards restored by the Philistines, it was left at Kirjath-jearim, where Eleazar, the

* Ch. xvii. 3-9.

† Ch. xii. 2-14.

‡ Ch. xxii. 10-31.

son of Abinadab, was consecrated to keep it. Here it appears to have been suffered to remain, separated from the Tabernacle, for the greater part of the time, during nearly half a century, till David removed it to Jerusalem. At one period, during this interval, it appears * that the Tabernacle, with priests, was at Nob, where undoubtedly sacrifices were offered. Meanwhile, Samuel, the prophet of Jehovah, called the people together before the Lord at Mizpeh, and, though not a priest, offered a burnt-offering.† He built an altar to Jehovah at Ramah, the place of his residence.‡ He assisted at a sacrifice on a high place, somewhere in the land of Zuph.§ He proposed to offer sacrifices at Gilgal.|| He again called the people before Jehovah at Mizpeh.¶ The people, under his direction, reacknowledged Saul as king before Jehovah at Gilgal, where they offered peace-offerings.** Bethel was another place where Jehovah was sought.†† And, not to multiply instances unnecessarily, we afterwards find mention of a grandson of Eli, “the Lord’s priest in Shiloh, wearing an ephod.” ‡‡

The author of the Book of Kings, speaking of the state of things at the commencement of Solomon’s reign, says,§§ —“The people sacrificed on high places, because there was no house built to the Lord until these days.” “Although,” says Le Clerc, |||| “according to the law in Leviticus, sacrifices ought to have been offered only where the Tabernacle was placed, yet that law had not hitherto been observed, nor was this imputed to the people as an offence.” Solomon

* 1 Samuel, ch. xxi., xxii.

† Ibid. vii. 17.

‡ Ibid. x. 8.

** Ibid. xi. 15.

†† Ibid. xiv. 3.

‡‡ Comment. in loc.

† Ibid. vii. 5–9.

§ Ibid. ix. 5, 12, 13.

¶ Ibid. x. 17.

‡‡ Ibid. x. 3.

§§ 1 Kings iii. 2.

himself, it is related, "went to sacrifice at Gibeon; for that was the great high place"; and so far, according to the narrative, was his conduct from being blamable, that the Lord there gave him the choice of whatever blessings he might desire.

It is true, that in relation to these facts, and others of the same kind, it may be said that we cannot infer that a law is not extant from the circumstance of its not being obeyed; that all laws are, more or less, disregarded and transgressed; that Moses was often disobeyed in his lifetime, and that therefore the Levitical Law may have existed, and may have proceeded from Moses, though it was disobeyed in all the instances that have been mentioned. The force of these general remarks is, however, invalidated, when we consider that the instances of supposed disobedience relate to ordinances most likely to be observed, as those concerning the celebration of festivals; to statutes essentially affecting the rights of property, and sanctioned by the promise of a regular interposition of God,* as those concerning the Sabbatical year and the Jubilee; and to laws apparently fundamental in the national worship, as those directing a single place to be fixed upon for the celebration of its rites; and we may add, though the fact has not been dwelt upon before, those appointing the priests to be the sole ministers in offering sacrifices. The case becomes more striking, when we find that these laws, supposing them in being, were not only disregarded, but disregarded without censure, by men who are represented as having been highly favored by the Lord.

* "And if ye ask, What shall we eat during the seventh year, seeing we must not sow nor gather in our increase? I answer, I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth produce for three years." Leviticus xxv. 20, 21.

But it is to be kept in mind, that it is not the proper purpose of these remarks directly to prove that the Levitical Law was not given by Moses. Perhaps the supposition that it was given by Moses may be reconcilable with all the facts that have been stated. The purpose of the preceding remarks has merely been to show that the supposed fact, that the Levitical Law in its present state was from the time of Moses the national Law of the Jews, cannot be rendered probable; and, therefore, that this supposed fact can afford no proof toward establishing the proposition, that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch.

From the examination we have gone through of the books of the Old Testament, it may appear that the existence of the Pentateuch, as we now possess it, cannot be traced, by any historical evidence, beyond the return of the Jews from their Captivity. According to a Jewish tradition before quoted,* they possessed on their return no copy of the Pentateuch. This tradition flattered none of their prejudices concerning it, and no national feeling; and this circumstance affords some presumption that it was founded on truth. It is such a tradition as might naturally arise, if the compilation and fashioning of the Pentateuch were subsequent to the Captivity; and one of which no account can be given, if this were not the fact.

If, indeed, the Pentateuch were not written by Moses, perhaps we cannot with probability assign to it, in its present form, an earlier date than some time after the return of the Jews from their Captivity. When restored to Palestine, their national polity was to be reestablished; they were again to be formed into a state. To effect this end, it was

* See pp. lxxiv, lxxv.

requisite that a written code of laws should be provided. In forming such a code, their ancient laws would naturally be revived. Some, perhaps, were inserted, of which only a traditional story existed, and which, it is not probable, ever had been, or ever were subsequently, observed; such, for example, as the law respecting the Sabbatical year.* New laws, we may suppose, were added to the old; and ceremonies, there is little doubt, were multiplied. At the same

* I, of course, attach no credit to the story of Josephus (*Antiq. Jud. Lib. XI. cap. 8. § 5*) respecting the remission of the tribute of every seventh year, obtained by the Jews from Alexander, which he apparently means to imply was on account of their observance of the Sabbatical years. His whole narrative concerning Alexander's interview with the Jewish high-priest, and of his favor to the Jewish nation, is unquestionably fabulous. It shows this character on its very face; and it has been made evident by Moyle, and others, that it will bear no critical examination. See Moyle's *Correspondence with Prideaux*, in the second volume of his *Works*, p. 26, seqq. Mitford's *History of Greece*, Ch. XLVIII. § 4. note 16. — Mitford, through some mistake, says that the story is told also "in the Book of Maccabees."

Josephus is not a writer to be trusted in any questionable case. It may be worth while to produce a single other illustration of his character, in a matter of some curiosity, which has not, so far as I know, been before brought to notice. Making a computation from the number of lambs sacrificed at the passover, he seems to imply that the number of Jews who had assembled at Jerusalem to celebrate the passover, and who were shut up in the city when besieged by Titus, was more than two millions and a half. But, putting aside this larger number, he expressly asserts that those who *perished* in the siege were eleven hundred thousand. (*De Bello Jud. Lib. VI. c. 9.*) The walls of the city, he elsewhere says (*Ibid. Lib. V. c. 4. § 3*), were thirty-three stadia in circumference. They, therefore, included less than one square mile. But a square mile, if levelled, and free from buildings and thoroughfares, would have afforded for each of the eleven hundred thousand persons, for himself, his furniture, utensils, provisions, and arms, a space of but little more than five feet square.

time, a strong national feeling must have revived among the Jews, together with a sense of their peculiar relation to God. The history of that dispensation which allied them to God would thus become an object of great interest. All traditions concerning it, written and oral, would be sought out and preserved. The laws of the nation would be ascribed, as far as possible, to their divinely commissioned Lawgiver; and for this it is not unlikely that some remaining book or books of their ancient laws, as well as the current of tradition, afforded abundant pretence. Thus, from written documents and oral traditions, we may suppose the Pentateuch to have been compiled by some of those who held the highest authority in the new state. Such a book, or rather such a collection of books, under the circumstances of the time, and with the excited feelings of the people, would be readily received. If some fabrications proceeded from the compilers, we should be slow, considering the state of ancient morality, and the loose notions of truth then prevailing, to bring this as a very grave charge against them. That the books were originally ascribed to Moses as their author is highly improbable; for, if their compilers had had any intention of representing him as their author, they would naturally have made him speak in the first person, and they would not have introduced the various passages which it is obvious, at the first glance, that he could not have written, as, for example, the account of his own death. But the Pentateuch was called "the Book of Moses"; and in this, as in numberless other cases, the ambiguity of language may have led into error. This title, meaning a book containing the history and laws of Moses, might easily, in process of time, in an uncritical age and nation, come to be interpreted as signifying a book written by Moses. The belief that he was the author of the whole of the Pentateuch

was undoubtedly greatly facilitated by the fact, that he is represented in it as having committed much or the whole of the Levitical Law to writing, and by the readiness with which a supposition would be admitted which ascribed a book of such a character to the inspired Lawgiver of the nation.

Such may have been the origin of the Pentateuch, supposing it not to be the work of Moses. But it is to be recollected that the main question before us is, not whether this particular hypothesis concerning its formation be probable, but whether it was written by Moses. In support of the proposition that he was its author, there is, as we have seen, properly speaking, no historical evidence. In all common cases this fact would be decisive of the question; since it would be wholly unreasonable to ascribe a work to a particular author, when we have no evidence that it was ascribed to him until a thousand years after his death. Whether this case be an extraordinary one, to which peculiar proof is applicable, is a question to which we shall hereafter attend, so far as is necessary. But it may here be recollected, that in our search for historical evidence we have not only seen that such evidence is wanting, but have found reasons for believing that the books in question were not written by Moses. For it is not credible that these books, if written by Moses, and carrying with them the authority of God, should not have been appealed to by the Prophets, the public teachers of the religion of God, who ought to have made them the basis of their instructions. Nor is it credible that they should have come so near perishing, as to be saved only by a providential discovery, just before the nation fell into ruin and captivity. The tradition of the Jews, that no copy of them was extant on the return of the nation from their Captivity, favors much more the supposition that they had their origin after that event, than the supposition which ascribes

them to Moses. And if it appear, that before that event fundamental ordinances of the Levitical Law were not observed, and even that individuals specially favored by Heaven acted contrary to them without censure from God or man, it affords a presumption, more or less strong, that the Levitical Law had not God for its author, nor Moses for the organ of its communication.

SECTION IV.

Some General Considerations respecting the Authorship of the Pentateuch.

It may appear, then, from what has been said, that there is no historical evidence that the Pentateuch was written by Moses; but, on the contrary, that the Jewish history affords proof that he was not its author. We will now pass to some general considerations by which the same conclusion seems to be established.

I. ACCORDING to the common computation, Moses lived in the fifteenth century before Christ. Such, however, I conceive to be the uncertainty of the early Jewish history and chronology, that no approach to accuracy can be made in fixing the time when he lived. But, though it may have been earlier, it probably was not much later than the period just mentioned; and in assuming this as correct we shall commit no error which will affect our reasoning.

There is, then, no satisfactory evidence that alphabetical writing was known at this period. If known to others, it is improbable that it was known to the Hebrews. And, in any case, there is no reason to suppose that they were so famil-

iar with its use, that a book, and especially that five such books as compose the Pentateuch, might have been written for their instruction. Such books are not written except for a people among whom there are many readers. The injunctions, likewise, respecting the use of writing in the Pentateuch,* imply that the Jews, at the time when they were given, were familiarly acquainted with it; and so also does the reference, which it contains, to another book, "The Book of the Wars of the Lord,"† as already in existence.

But it must have been long after the first rudiments of alphabetical writing had been attained, before the invention was brought to a state so nearly complete as that in which it appears in the Hebrew alphabet. It must have been a still longer time before an acquaintance with it had become so common as to lead to its use for the purpose of communicating instruction by books. Probably it was first used in inscriptions, and in committing to writing compositions, principally metrical, which had already become familiar by oral tradition. In the latter case, the intended significance of the newly discovered signs being already known, they would be easily deciphered, and the art of reading would thus be gradually spread. Books, like those which form the Pentateuch, in prose, and in a style so well constructed, must have been comparatively a very late result of the invention. But, if we suppose Moses to have been the author of the Pentateuch, we must suppose that before his time the art of writing was in common use, and the consequent demand for the materials employed in it so great, as to render them of very easy acquisition; for Moses must either have provided himself prospectively with a large store of them in the haste of

* Deut. vi. 9; xi. 20; xxiv. 1.

† Numbers xxi. 14.

his departure from Egypt, or have afterwards obtained them in the deserts of Arabia. But for a long time after the supposed date of the Pentateuch we find no proof of the existence of a book, or even of an inscription, in proper alphabetical characters, among the nations by whom the Hebrews were surrounded.

The descendants of Jacob, according to their history, resided not less than two hundred and fifteen years in Egypt. During this time they could not have learned alphabetical writing from the Egyptians; for the mode of representing ideas to the eye, which the Egyptians employed till a period long subsequent, was widely different from the alphabetical writing of the Hebrews. Nor is it probable that the descendants of Jacob, who were first shepherds and then slaves in Egypt, were the inventors of the art. If they were acquainted with it, they must, it would seem, have brought it with them into the country. But we can hardly suppose that it was invented or acquired, except by tradition, in the family of Isaac, or in that of Jacob before his residence in Egypt, engaged as they both were in agriculture and the care of cattle. We must, then, go back to Abraham, at least, for what traditionary knowledge of it his descendants in Egypt may be supposed to have possessed. But it would be idle to argue against the supposition, that alphabetical writing was known in the time of Abraham.

II. We proceed to another consideration. The vocabulary and style of the Pentateuch cannot have been the vocabulary and style of Moses. There is no important difference between the Hebrew of the Pentateuch and that of the other books of the Old Testament written before the reestablishment of the Jews in Palestine after their Captivity. But from the time of Moses to this event was an interval of

about nine hundred or a thousand years. Every other language, the history of which we can trace, if it have continued a living language, has undergone great changes during the same or a shorter period; as, for instance, the English, during the four centuries and a half since the days of Wicliff and Chaucer, and the Latin, in a still shorter interval between the laws of the Twelve Tables and the time of Cicero. But the language of the Israelites was peculiarly exposed to change during the long period of its existence as a spoken tongue after the time of Moses. Its vocabulary, never copious, must have been originally barren; accommodated to the wants of a people having but a narrow sphere of thought. It must not only have enlarged itself to receive the new accession of religious conceptions communicated by Moses, but must have been afterward in a state of continual growth, to adapt itself to the subsequent intellectual development of the Hebrews, and to the most extraordinary circumstances in which they were placed by the new dispensation. After the death of Moses, they established themselves in a new country, widely different in its natural aspect from Egypt; — from being slaves employed in making bricks, they became accustomed to the use of arms; — they were placed in new relations, and became familiar with new objects and new customs. They were pressed upon by other nations, speaking, as we have reason to believe, languages or dialects different from their own, with whom they intermingled, whose idolatrous rites, and other customs, they sometimes adopted, and to whom, in the earlier part of their history, they were sometimes in servitude. Their engaging in commerce in the time of Solomon must have had its customary effect to give a new coloring to their speech. Before the time of Samuel, they were wholly without that attention to literature, and that intellectual cultivation, which

might have served to fix their language, and certainly had no literary watchfulness to guard against its corruption; nor can we suppose that those habits of mind existed in a high degree during any stage of their history. Under such circumstances, a language cannot remain the same for nine or ten centuries. The supposition, that the Pentateuch in its present form was written by Moses, is as untenable as would be the supposition that some book written in modern English was a composition of the age of Chaucer. The attempts which have been made to point out certain archaisms of style in the Pentateuch only show that no evidence can be produced of such peculiarity of language as the case requires.* Nor is the existence of those supposed archa-

* In treating of the perfection of the Hebrew language, Leusden, one of the most learned Hebrew scholars of his time, thus writes: — “The uniformity of the Hebrew language in all the books of the Old Testament contributes much to its perfection. I have often wondered that there should be so great a correspondence between the Hebrew of all the books of the Old Testament, when we know that they were composed by different men (whose respective styles of writing are often distinguishable), at diverse times, and in diverse places. Should a book be written by different men of the same city, we should perceive for the most part greater differences in it, as respects style or orthography, or some other circumstances, than appear in the whole Old Testament. But let a book be written by a German and by a Frieslander, or let there be an interval of a thousand years between the writers, as there was between many of those of the Old Testament, what a difference of language would appear! He who understood the writing of one might scarcely understand that of the other. Nay, the difference of time and place would render their modes of speech so unlike, that it would be very difficult to apply to them the same rules of grammar and syntax. But in the Old Testament there is so great a uniformity, such a correspondence in orthography and construction, that one might almost think that all the books were written at the same time and in the same place,

isms difficult to be accounted for. The Pentateuch, if not the work of Moses, was undoubtedly, in great part, a compilation; and from the preëxisting documents or traditions which formed its basis those few antiquated or peculiar forms of speech might be copied or imitated.

III. In the next place, it may be observed that the Pentateuch contains passages which, it is agreed, could not have been written by Moses. Some of them are obvious to every reader; as, for instance, the account of his own death, and the passage in Genesis † in which it is said,—

though by different authors." Philologus Hebræus, Diss. XVII. pp. 166, 167.

It is the opinion of Gesenius, the most distinguished Hebrew scholar of our day, that the antiquity of the Hebrew language, in its *present form*, hardly reaches higher than the age of David or Solomon. "Upon the supposition," he says, "that the Pentateuch was a production of the age of Moses, we must indeed carry its existence back to a period considerably more remote. But, notwithstanding the learned defenders which that supposition has found in our own age, it can scarcely approve itself to the judgment of an unprejudiced critic. . . . It is a fact that the language of the Pentateuch fully corresponds with that of the other ancient historical books, and, in the poetical portions, with that of the other poetry of the first age." [Gesenius considers the first age of the Hebrew language as extending to the time when it was corrupted by the influence of the Chaldee in consequence of the Captivity.] "If there was an interval of nearly a thousand years between these writings, as there must have been on the supposition that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, a phenomenon would be presented to which there is nothing parallel in the whole history of language, namely, that the living language of a people, and the circle of their ideas, should remain so unaltered for such a length of time." *Geschichte der Hebräischen Sprache und Schrift*; — History of the Hebrew Language and Modes of Writing, § 8.

† Ch. xxxvi. 31.

“These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the children of Israel.” But such passages, it is said, do not prove that the Pentateuch was not his work; they are to be regarded only as additions made to it by some later hand. To this it may be answered, that there is a presumption that a work is not to be ascribed to a particular individual when it contains a considerable number of passages which he obviously could not have written, though this presumption, undoubtedly, may be overcome by opposite evidence. It may be remarked, likewise, that, upon the supposition that Moses was the writer of the Pentateuch, there would have been a natural reluctance among the Hebrews to making or permitting such useless interpolations; to thus tampering with a work so venerable, the composition of their inspired lawgiver, recording the very words of God himself; their infallible directory in religion and morals, and the unalterable code of their civil law. A book thus unique might be expected to escape corruption. During the period concerning which we have satisfactory evidence that the Pentateuch has been so regarded by the Jews, we know that such interpolations have not been made in it.

But it is unnecessary to insist on these considerations; there is another to be attended to. At the time when those supposed interpolations were made, no importance could have been attached to the belief that the Pentateuch was written by Moses. The necessary effect of such interpolations was to incorporate into the book itself evidence, — false evidence, it may be said, but still evidence, and such as appears at first view decisive, — that the book was not written by him. Those, therefore, by whom the interpolations were introduced could not have attached any importance to a belief which they took such means to destroy.

But to say that no importance was attached to the belief that the Pentateuch was written by Moses is but saying, in other words, that it did not exist; for it is impossible, if the belief existed, that it should not have been considered as essentially affecting the character and authority of the Pentateuch.

IV. **THERE** is another consideration. The books of the Pentateuch do not claim to be the work of Moses. They profess to contain his history, but they are not professedly written by him.

This fact has been regarded as of little weight; because in other historical works, as in those of Cæsar and Clarendon, the author has spoken of himself in the third person. But this is a deviation from common usage and the natural mode of expression, occasioned by some particular motive. It may be adopted by a writer in order to avoid an air of arrogance or vanity; or to give the appearance of impartiality to his history, as if it were unaffected by his personal feelings; or to place himself under the same point of view with other individuals whom he introduces into his narrative. It is a mode of writing which belongs not to a rude, but to a refined age; and no probable reason can be assigned why it should have been adopted by Moses. Such a semblance of modesty would have been wholly unsuitable to his office. As the minister of God to his countrymen, it was his business to speak with authority, to assert his claims to deference, and to place himself without reserve before them, as one whom they were bound to listen to and obey.

But the fact is of much importance under another aspect. Did the Pentateuch assume to be the work of Moses, then, in denying it to be his work, we should be driven to the

supposition of intentional fraud. But this would be the supposition, not merely of a very gross imposture, but of an imposture which, as regards such books, ascribed to such an author, was very unlikely to be attempted, and very unlikely to be successful. On the other hand, there is no difficulty in supposing that a series of books might at any time be readily received by the Jews, which, without claiming to be the work of Moses, embodied the traditions respecting their ancient history, and those that had long been gathering round his name, and which referred to him as their author those laws that had been gradually built up on the basis of his institutions.

SECTION V.

On the Internal Character of the Pentateuch.

THE arguments hitherto adduced do not involve the credibility of the narratives contained in the Pentateuch, or any moral or religious considerations. It is different with those about to be stated.

In judging whether the Pentateuch be the work of Moses, that is, of a writer deserving the highest credit, we must consider whether the narratives it contains are in themselves credible. These narratives may be divided into two classes, — those which relate to natural, and those which relate to supernatural events. As regards either class, it may be sufficient to direct attention to the subject, and then leave it to every one's private investigation and thought. Of many examples a few may be adduced which seem to show that the history cannot be regarded as authentic, nor as the work

of a contemporary of the supposed events which it narrates. We will first attend to those narratives which concern events not miraculous.

I. THE number of fighting men among the Israelites ("every male from twenty years old and upward"), immediately after their leaving Egypt, is said to have been more than six hundred thousand; the numbers of each tribe being particularly given.* This statement of the whole sum of the fighting men is repeatedly made.† It included none from the tribe of Levi, who did not go forth to war. The whole number of the Israelites, therefore, at the time of their leaving Egypt, cannot be estimated at less than two millions and a half. More than eighty years before the time of their departure, a king of Egypt is represented as saying,—"Lo! the people of the children of Israel are more numerous and stronger than we." The land of Egypt is said to have been filled with them.‡ Let us consider this account of their numbers.

The Israelites who established themselves in Egypt, that is, Jacob and his descendants, are stated in the books of Genesis and Exodus to have been seventy in number.§ To these, in reckoning the progenitors of the nation, must be added the wives of his sons and grandsons. Their number is uncertain; but, as only two of his grandsons

* Numbers i. 19 - 46.

† Numbers ii. 32; xi. 21; xxvi. 51. Exod. xii. 37; xxxviii. 26.

‡ Exod. i. 7, 9.

§ Genesis xli. 5 - 27. Exodus i. 5. Stephen, in his speech (Acts vii. 14), says "seventy-five," following the Septuagint. It has been supposed, that, to make this number, the five grandsons of Joseph, who were born after the establishment of Jacob's family in Egypt, are added.

are mentioned as having children at this time, if we assume that the progenitors of the Israelites amounted to two hundred, the whole error in our estimate must be through excess. No one who receives the accounts in Genesis and Exodus as authentic can suppose that the number was greater.

How long, then, did the Israelites remain in Egypt? There are two different opinions on the subject; according to one of which the period of their residence was two hundred and fifteen years, and according to the other, four hundred and thirty. Passing over some critical considerations which bear upon the question, there are others that may enable us to form a judgment respecting it. It cannot be believed that the Israelites would have remained a distinct people among the Egyptians for four hundred and thirty years. Four hundred and thirty years are a sixth part of that period beyond which darkness and uncertainty settle upon the whole history of mankind. When we look back to the changes that have taken place since the commencement of the fifteenth century of our era, we may have some notion of what is likely to occur during such a length of time. After the Jews had been separated by God from the rest of men through the ministry of Moses, their religion might prevent them from mixing with other nations. But while they were in Egypt, there was no permanent obstacle to their becoming incorporated with the Egyptians as one people; and in the nature of things, such an incorporation would have taken place in the course of four centuries.

Upon their leaving Egypt, we find that all the descendants of each of the twelve sons of Jacob could severally be referred to their respective progenitors. The nation could readily be divided into twelve tribes. But we can hardly

suppose this to have been possible after an interval of four centuries. When established in Canaan, there may have been particular reasons for their preserving their family genealogies, but there was none before. They were in the same circumstances in this respect as the generality of men in other nations; and in what other nation have the individuals composing it been able to trace back their genealogy for four hundred years, each to a particular son of a common ancestor?

But the genealogy of Moses may alone seem decisive of the question. Moses, on his mother's side, is stated to have been the grandson of Levi. "The name of Amram's wife was Jochebed, a daughter of Levi, whom her mother bare to Levi in Egypt, and she bore unto Amram Aaron, and Moses, and Miriam, their sister." * It has been suggested that by "a daughter of Levi" may be meant nothing more than "a woman of the tribe of Levi." But the probability of this interpretation may be tested by substituting the latter words for the former, in the passage before us:—"The name of Amram's wife was Jochebed, a woman of the tribe of Levi, whom her mother bore to Levi in Egypt." According to the explanation proposed, the last clause is worse than a mere useless repetition. It perplexes the sense. The assertion, that "the mother of Jochebed bore her to Levi," can mean only what the writer is supposed to have just said,—that Jochebed *was of the tribe of Levi*; and the addition, that she bore her "in Egypt," becomes altogether idle. But if there were any doubt about the meaning of this passage, it would be settled by another in Exodus,† where it is said that Kohath was the son of Levi, and that Amram was the son of Kohath, and thus the grandson of

* Numbers xxvi. 59.

† Ch. vi. 16-20.

Levi; and that "Amram took him to wife Jochebed his father's sister," who was consequently Levi's daughter, "and she bare him Aaron and Moses." The statement of the same fact, that Jochebed, the mother of Moses, was the daughter of Levi, in these two different forms, can leave no question as to the meaning of the writer. Yet about eighty years before the Israelites left Egypt, Jochebed was capable of bearing children; for Moses is said to have been eighty years old when he spoke to Pharaoh.* As Moses was, on his mother's side, the grandson of Levi, so he was on his father's side the grandson of Kohath, who was born before the Israelites entered Egypt.† Upon the supposition that the Pentateuch was written by him, it is to be recollected that this is his own account of his progenitors. It follows from it, that the residence of the Israelites in Egypt could not have extended to four hundred and thirty years; and that, in choosing between this and two hundred and fifteen, we must take the smaller number. One cannot, indeed, very plausibly reconcile the genealogy of Moses even with the shorter period.

Assuming, then, the period of two hundred and fifteen years, we may calculate the probable increase of two hundred individuals during this time. It must be under favorable circumstances that they would, through such a period, double their numbers once in twenty-five years. But the Israelites were, according to the account in Exodus, placed in circumstances very unfavorable to their increase during the last eighty years of their residence in Egypt; the king having ordered their male children to be destroyed, and they themselves being reduced to miserable servitude. Supposing them, however, to have been originally two hundred in-

* Exodus vii. 7.

† Genesis xlii. 11.

dividuals, and to have increased at the rate just mentioned, their numbers, upon leaving Egypt, would have amounted to something less than a hundred thousand, instead of two millions and a half.

But whatever was the rate of increase among the Israelites, no reason can be given why they should have multiplied faster than the Egyptians. That the rate of increase of the former should so vastly exceed that of the latter, as it must have done according to the history in the Pentateuch, is incredible. If the Israelites at the time of their departure amounted to two millions and a half, their original number had been increased twelve thousand five hundred times; if it amounted to a hundred thousand, it had been increased five hundred times. But if we suppose merely a million of inhabitants in Egypt at the time when the Israelites entered it, then any thing approximating to the lowest rate of increase for the whole population of which they made a part is obviously out of question. The writer of the Pentateuch, however, represents a single family of sixty-eight male members as entering one of the principal ancient kingdoms, and in a certain time — whether two hundred or four hundred years is here unimportant — becoming formidable through their numbers to the other inhabitants of the country, of the population of which it would be unreasonable to suppose that they originally formed a ten-thousandth part.

II. **THERE** is much in the history of the Israelites which becomes incredible, on the supposition that their number approached to what it is represented to have been. When, according to the account, the two or three millions of Israelites left Egypt, they were accompanied by “a mixed multitude who went along with them, and flocks, and herds,

even an abundance of cattle." * Yet this immense body is represented as having been collected, arrayed, and put in motion in a single day, in consequence of a hasty command of Pharaoh given the preceding night.† In what time could this nation of men, women, and children, with all their sick and aged, with their domestic animals, and their necessary baggage, have defiled, in the face of an enemy, through the Red Sea? According to the history it was done in a single night. How long must it have taken such a multitude of men and cattle to quench the thirst of which they were perishing at the waters of Marah, or by those which gushed from the rock of Horeb? What extent of territory must have been covered by two or three millions of men encamped in tents among the rocky defiles, the mountainous and broken country around Sinai, or along the eastern shore of the Red Sea? From the history we

* Exodus xii. 36.

† Exodus xii. Numbers xxxiii. 3. The passover was slain on the fourteenth day of the month. The following midnight the first-born of the Egyptians were destroyed. The same night Pharaoh issued his order for the departure of the Israelites; and during the fifteenth day the Israelites were on their march. I should not mention these particulars, which are obvious in the passages referred to, had I not observed an oversight in the valuable "Biblical Researches" of Professor Robinson, to which he seems to have been unconsciously led by an indistinct sense of the utter incredibility of the narrative as actually given. He says (Vol. I. p. 80), — "From the time when Pharaoh dismissed Moses and Aaron in the night of [following] the fourteenth day of the month (according to the Jewish reckoning), until the morning of the fifteenth day, when the people set off, there was an interval of some thirty hours." Between some time after the midnight which followed the fourteenth day of the month, and the morning of the fifteenth, there could have been an interval of but a very few hours.

should receive the impression that they were a body capable of being readily assembled, and orally addressed by Moses or Aaron; a body which might all be put in motion in the morning, accomplish a day's journey, and at night encamp at a particular place; as at "Elim, where there were twelve wells of water, and they encamped there by the waters." *

III. THE number of the Israelites, we are told, had alarmed one of the kings of Egypt. Before the birth of Moses, that is, about eighty years before the Israelites left Egypt, or one hundred and thirty-five after the family of sixty-eight males entered it, the king is represented as saying, — "Lo! the people of Israel are more numerous and stronger than we; come, let us wisely prevent their multiplying." † Being alarmed at their numbers, he resolved to provoke their most deadly and desperate hatred. He "made their lives bitter" by reducing them to slavery; and issued an order for the destruction of all their male children. After an unsuccessful attempt fully to effect the latter purpose, this order is said to have assumed the following horrible form: — "Then Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river." ‡ To outrage to the utmost a formidable nation, to exercise upon it an extravagance of cruelty which no tribe of men, however feeble, would tamely endure, virtually to declare a war of extermination upon the Israelites, in the most odious form which war could assume, are the expedients that Pharaoh is represented as adopting through dread of their enmity. Nor is this the most extraordinary part of the history. The Israelites, as far as appears from

* Exodus xv. 27.

† Exodus i. 9, 10.

‡ Exodus i. 22.

it, submitted without resistance to be made slaves, and to have their infants murdered as a matter of common usage. The voice of human nature pronounces this to be impossible. No people was ever so far degraded below the brutes, who expose their own lives in defence of their young.

IV. BUT the king is represented as, at the same time, in dread of their power, and fearful lest they should withdraw themselves from Egypt, — “lest they should join his enemies, and by force of arms leave the country”; * and, according to the narrative, one of his successors considered their remaining in Egypt as of so much importance, that he manifested the most insane obstinacy in refusing to permit their departure. It must have been only for their value as slaves that the kings of Egypt were so desirous to keep the Hebrews in their land. But how is this to be reconciled with an order for the destruction of their male children, — that is, for the gradual extermination of those Hebrew slaves who were such valuable property, that supernatural inflictions of the most terrible kind were to be endured, or the hazard of them encountered, rather than that they should be suffered to quit the country?

V. WHEN at last an order for their departure was extorted, we find them represented as leaving the country in such haste, that they “took their unleavened dough in the kneading vessels, wrapped up in their garments upon their shoulders”; and during their first day’s journey “baked unleavened cakes of the dough”; “for they were

* Exodus i. 10.

thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry ; nor had they prepared for themselves any provision." * As we have before remarked, however, they carried with them "flocks and herds, even an abundance of cattle"; and they carried them into the desert which borders the Red Sea to the west, where no supply of herbage was to be found for their subsistence. Crossing the Red Sea, they commenced their march toward Mount Sinai, through a region of frightful sterility. In this desert they journeyed for three days without water, and, as would appear from the preceding account, without food. At the end of the third day they were furnished with sweet water by a miracle.† What number had perished in the mean time is not told. During their whole journeying and residence along the coast of the Red Sea and in the desert of Sinai, where water for a few travellers is often difficult to be procured, we read of their having a miraculous supply only in one other instance.‡ Their sufferings from hunger, we are told, were great before their arriving at Sinai; and quails and manna were miraculously provided for their support.§ Their cattle, of course, had perished, or been killed. The manna was continued for the whole forty years of their journeyings, till they came "to an inhabited land." Yet, before quitting their encampment around Sinai, they are again described as having an abundance of cattle for sacrifices, and of lambs for the pass-over, flour, oil, and wine, and a profusion of spices.|| Departing from Mount Sinai to march through "a great and

* Exodus xii. 34, 39.

† Exod. xv. 22 - 25.

‡ At Horeb. Exod. xvii. 1, seqq.

§ Exod. xvi.

|| Exod. Ch. xxiv. 5. Ch. xxix. Ch. xxx. 23, seqq. Leviticus, Ch. viii., ix. Numbers, Ch. iii. 41, 45. Ch. vii. Ch. ix. 2-14, &c.

terrible wilderness," * the people complained and wept, saying, " Who will give us flesh to eat ? " and were again miraculously supplied with quails.† After this their sufferings from want of water return ; but their cattle are still alive ; for they thus expostulate with Moses and Aaron : — " Why have ye brought the people of God into this wilderness, where both ourselves and our cattle must die ? " ‡ Thus the whole nation of the Israelites, and not these only, but " a mixed multitude who went with them," § are represented as remaining forty years in deserts, where they must have perished, but for a constant miraculous supply of food ; and as having at the same time herds of cattle, which, in their longings after flesh, they refrained from eating. The food of their cattle must also have been furnished by some astonishing miracle, of which the historian has supplied no account. Equally for men and beasts an uninterrupted miraculous supply of water was necessary ; but the supposition that such an uninterrupted supply was afforded is precluded by the circumstance, that four particular cases are specified in which it was given.|| The Jewish Rabbis, though in general not apt to startle at absurdities, perceived this deficiency in their history, and endeavoured to supply it by a tradition, alluded to by St. Paul,¶ that the rock of Horeb, or the water which gushed from it, followed the Israelites in their wanderings.

VI. AN incongruity, only less glaring, is found in the

* Deut. i. 19. † Numbers, Ch. xi. ‡ Numbers xx. 4.

§ Exod. xii. 38. Numbers xi. 4.

|| At Marah, Exod. xv. 23, seqq. At Horeb, Exod. xvii. 1, seqq. At Meribah, Numbers xx. 2, seqq. And at Beer, Numbers xxi. 16, seqq.

¶ 1 Corinthians x. 4. On which passage see Wetstein's note.

accounts of the wealth possessed by the Israelites, while encamped around Sinai, in gold, silver, brass, precious stones, fine linen of different colors, boards of setim wood, aromatics, spices, and various other articles of luxury, and of their skill in different arts.* They could have acquired neither their wealth nor their skill by their employment as slaves in Egypt in the making of bricks.† Their skill, it may be said, was miraculously conferred. But this solution will not apply to the casting of the golden calf by Aaron.‡ A part of their wealth it may be said that they procured from the Egyptians, from whom, before leaving Egypt, they

* Exodus, Ch. xiv. — xxviii. Ch. xxx, xxxi. Ch. xxxii. vv. 2-4, 20, 24. Ch. xxxv — xxxix.

† In speaking of the account of the construction of the tabernacle, Dr. Priestley says ("Notes on Scripture," Exod. xxxvi. 5), — "In short, there is no art known to the ancients, a thousand years after this time, with which the Israelites do not appear to have been well acquainted." It is strange that a man of so much acuteness as Dr. Priestley should have written such a sentence without perceiving its obvious bearing on the credibility of the history. The coincidence between his mention of "a thousand years after the time" of Moses, and the not improbable date of the final compilation of the Pentateuch, is perhaps worthy of notice. — We are told, in the Book of Samuel, that some centuries after the period when the Israelites are represented as so skilful in the arts, "there was no smith in Israel," so that they had neither swords nor spears; and "all the Israelites went down to the Philistines to sharpen every man his share, and his coulter, and his axe, and his mattock." (1 Samuel xiii. 19-22.)

‡ Exodus xxxii. — The opinion entertained by some commentators, that Aaron carved the image in wood, and then overlaid it with gold, which is thought to lighten the difficulties attending the narrative, seems to be inconsistent with its being called a molten calf, and directly contrary to what Aaron is made to say (v. 24), — "Then I cast the gold into the fire, and there came out this calf."

asked and obtained "articles made of silver and of gold, and raiment."* The story of "their spoiling of the Egyptians," in consequence of a divine direction, presents difficulties quite as serious as those which it may be brought forward to remove. But, however great may have been the generosity of the Egyptians, in gifts of gold and silver utensils and raiment, it will account only for a part of the wealth of the Israelites, much of which consisted in other stores. Nor is any explanation to be given, why the Israelites, who were removing such a profusion of articles of luxury into the desert, and who consequently had provided means for the conveyance of them, should have borne away, in the hurry of their departure, their yet unleavened dough in the kneading-vessels upon their shoulders, and should have had no opportunity to provide any store of provisions for their own sustenance. If the Israelites possessed all those articles in the desert, they had, as I have said, means of transporting them. But such does not appear to have been the case. The camel is the only beast of burden which could have been used; and there is no mention of their possessing camels.

VII. CONCERNING the inhabitants of Palestine, the Israel-

* Exodus iii. 21, 22; xi. 2; xii. 35, 36. The Common Version says, that the Israelites "borrowed" of the Egyptians, and the Egyptians "lent" them what they asked for. If they "borrowed," it was with a promise of returning, expressed or implied. But it is far from certain that the words in the original correspond to those terms, the use of which I have, therefore, avoided. The one party asked as presents, it has been said, and the other party gave, articles of gold and silver, and raiment. The causes which have been assigned for this extraordinary liberality of the Egyptians are such, it seems to me, as will bear no discussion.

ites are said to have been told by Moses, — “Ye may not destroy them at once, lest the wild beasts increase upon you.” They were, therefore, to be expelled “by little and little,” in proportion to the gradual increase of the Hebrews.* These nations, however, would not have waited in peace to be extirpated at the convenience of their enemies; and, if engaged with them in a war of extermination, they would have been more formidable than the wild beasts. The mention of the latter is another strange circumstance. Palestine, at the time when it was invaded by the Hebrews, is described as being inhabited by nations greater and more powerful than they (though their numbers had caused fear to the Egyptians), as having in it large cities “walled up to heaven,” and as being highly cultivated, “flowing with milk and honey.”† The whole extent of Palestine is less than two hundred miles in length, and a hundred in average breadth. Supposing the Israelites to have been the sole inhabitants of so small a territory, lately so populous, it would not have required that their numbers should be two millions and a half, nor more than a tenth part of two millions and a half, to secure them from the ravages of wild beasts.

THE history contained in the Pentateuch is not to be judged of only by the few examples of apparent impossibilities, or inconsistencies, which I have specified, — not selected, except, indeed, with reference to their being such as might be rendered obvious in a few words. The attempts to explain the Pentateuch as authentic history present a constant struggle with difficulties. The com-

* Deut. vii. 22. Exod. xxiii. 29, 30.

† Exod. iii. 8. Numbers xiii. 27, 28. Deut. viii. 7-9; ix. 1, etc.

mentator is continually called upon to soften down the features of what seems incredible, and to create hypotheses by which he may reduce what looks like a fabulous tradition from a remote age to a form that may appear consistent with the character of God, the nature of man, and the circumstances of the individuals who are brought into view. As regards this sort of explanation, it is to be remarked, that we may sometimes admit a conjecture possible, though not in itself probable, to explain a difficulty in a history of established credit; but that a history cannot be trustworthy which demands a constant succession of such conjectures.

BEFORE speaking of the narratives of supernatural events, there is one distinguishing feature of the history, its representation of the conduct and character of the Israelites, too important to be wholly passed over. It must strike every attentive reader, that he is conversant throughout with men whose characters he cannot enter into, whose states of mind he cannot comprehend, who are continually acting in a manner different from that in which he himself would act; men with whom he has nothing in common. The history is inconsistent with human nature. We may take, as an example, the conduct ascribed throughout to the Israelites in relation to the Deity. According to the history, they witnessed, for a long succession of years, displays of miraculous power, the most astonishing, the most magnificent, and the most appalling; a power never suspending its operations, but continually displaying itself in the pillar of cloud, and pillar of flame, in visible descents of the Deity, and even in the supply of their daily food. It was announced to them, that they were selected as the peculiar objects of the favor and protection of the Being whose pow-

er was thus made known. Great blessings were promised as the reward of obedience, and terrible punishments threatened for disobedience. Under these circumstances the minds of any human beings must have been wholly subdued. Every motive, from the highest to the lowest; duty, gratitude, hope, fear, pride in their wonderful distinction; all good in prospect on the one side, and nothing but destruction on the other; and, above all, the visible presence of the Almighty, must have determined them to obedience. Yet the conduct of the Israelites is described to have been such as to justify the language which Moses is said to have addressed to them a little before his death,—"From the day in which ye departed from the land of Egypt, until your arrival at this place, ye have been rebelling against Jehovah." *

LET us now attend to the miraculous part of the history, — the manner in which God is described as making himself known to his creatures by acts and words. In some of the conceptions which the Pentateuch presents of the Infinite Being, we perceive, I think, very striking remains of the revelation by Moses, and, as we may reasonably believe, of earlier communications of God to men. The account, for instance, of the Creation, contained in the first chapter of Genesis, appears a monument of magnificent simplicity, when compared with other ancient cosmogonies. The genius of Plato, as displayed in his *Timæus*, shrinks before it. Throughout the Pentateuch are enforced in the strongest manner the fundamental truths of one Supreme Being, who is God alone, of his interest in the concerns of men, and of his moral government. The latter conception,

* Deut. ix. 7.

indeed, is obscured by the imperfect notions of morality belonging to the rude ages during which the traditions now found in the Pentateuch may be supposed to have been moulded into their present form. The idea of the unmingled benevolence of the Deity, that God is Love, that afflictions and punishments flow from his mercy equally with our joys, is not to be found there ; but it is an idea to which the human intellect, through the aid of revelation, has attained only in its fullest development. But when we compare the conceptions of God presented in the Pentateuch with the representations of heathen divinities in the poems of Homer, we shall perceive the immeasurable superiority of the former. In the great precepts, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," and "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," we find a conception of the foundations of religion and morality, unknown to heathen antiquity. In coming to the Pentateuch we have entered the precincts of true religion, though grotesque shapes are around us, and the heavens are obscured by clouds from which the thunder is rolling.

These remarks respecting the Pentateuch will not appear incongruous with those that follow, if we recollect that its books admit of being viewed in relation to two wholly different standards. If we regard them as a traditionary, erroneous account of the early revelations of God to men, especially of his revelation through Moses, we may compare their representations of the Deity with the contemporary superstition and idolatry of the heathen world. If we regard them as the work of Moses, and consequently as containing an authentic record of the revelation of God through him, we must compare those representations with the conceptions of God which Christianity has enabled us to form. Such is the comparison now to be instituted, in

pursuing the inquiry whether the books of the Pentateuch were written by Moses.

It is not necessary to dwell on the narratives in Genesis concerning the appearances and acts of God. They evidently imply very rude conceptions of his nature. But there is little doubt among those who have examined the subject, that the Book of Genesis is a compilation of prior accounts, oral or written; and it may be said that the narratives which it contains had gradually assumed their present form, and that Moses thought it best to retain conceptions and language with which his contemporaries were familiar. But it is to be observed, that when we come to the narrative of facts, of which, if we regard Moses as the author of the Pentateuch, he had personal experience, the character of the history does not improve. There is nothing more strange in the Book of Genesis than the narrative in the fourth chapter of Exodus, in which it is related, that after Moses had been solemnly commissioned and sent by God to the Israelites, while "he was on his way, at a lodging-place, Jehovah met him and sought to slay him," — with all that follows. Respecting this branch of our subject, like the former, it will be necessary to remark particularly only on a few passages, which may serve as representatives of many others.

I. In the twenty-fourth chapter of Exodus, there is the following account. "And Jehovah said to Moses, Come up unto me, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship afar off. . . . Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under his feet a pavement of lucid sapphire, clear as the very heavens. And on the chief men of the

children of Israel He laid not his hand ; and they saw God ; and they ate and drank. And Jehovah said to Moses, Come up to me upon the mount, and there remain, and I will give you tables of stone, with the law and commandments which I have written, that thou mayest teach the people. And the glory of Jehovah abode on Mount Sinai, and a cloud covered it for six days ; and the seventh day he called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. And the sight of the glory of Jehovah was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the view of the children of Israel. And Moses entered into the midst of the cloud, and ascended the mountain. And Moses was upon the mountain forty days and forty nights. And Jehovah spake to Moses, saying " —

Before proceeding farther, let us consider, that, according to the history, we are about to listen, as it were, to the very words of God, addressed to that minister with whom he "spoke as man to man." After all this tremendous solemnity of preparation, after having been summoned into the visible presence of the Deity, after having seen God and lived, what must have been the expectation of the elders of Israel respecting the momentous import of the divine communication ? Let us imagine that some of their number had formed just and enlarged conceptions of God, and had speculated upon the condition and prospects of mankind. They must have been looking earnestly for some revelation which would send a stream of light through the darkness that rested upon the world ; which would disclose to their erring and suffering race new relations and new hopes ; which should raise man in his moral nature nearer to the Author of his being ; which should be listened to with intense interest, wherever made known, by all human beings in all ages to come. What, then, was the communication ?

“And Jehovah spake to Moses, saying, Tell the children of Israel to bring me an offering. From every one whose heart is willing to give ye shall take my offering. And these are the offerings which ye shall take from them : gold, and silver, and brass, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats’ hair, and rams’ skins dyed red, and seals’ skins, and setim wood, oil for the lamps, aromatics for the anointing oil and for the sweet incense ; onyx-stones, and other stones, to be set in the ephod and breastplate. And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. Ye shall make it according to the pattern of the tabernacle, and all its utensils, which I show thee.

“They shall make an ark of setim wood, two cubits and a half in length, and a cubit and a half in breadth, and a cubit and a half in height ; and thou shalt overlay it with pure gold. Within and without shalt thou overlay it ; and thou shalt make a moulding of gold about it.”

We may stop here ; but seven chapters are filled with directions as trivial. So wholly unconnected are they with any moral or religious sentiment, or any truth important or unimportant, — except the melancholy fact of their having been regarded as a divine communication, — that it requires a strong effort to read through with attention these pretended words of the Infinite Being. The natural tendency of a belief that such words proceeded from Him, whenever this belief prevailed, must have been to draw away the regard of the Jews from all that is worthy of man as a moral and intellectual being, and to fix it on the humblest objects of superstition. It is not to be forgotten, however, that this tendency was strongly counteracted by much of a different character that is to be found in the Pentateuch.

II. But throughout the Pentateuch such accounts of the Supreme Being occur as may excuse or justify the unfavorable conceptions entertained by the Gnostics of the god of the Jews. It is related, for instance, that he inflicted the most terrible evils upon the Egyptians, solely on account of the mad obstinacy of their despot, from whose tyranny they without doubt were already suffering in common with the Israelites.* But, passing over every other less striking example of the same kind, we will advert only to the order for the extirpation of the Canaanites; and to the manner in which the Midianitish captives are said to have been treated by the command of Moses, acting as the minister of Jehovah.

The expedition sent against the Midianites, after destroying all the adult males, without the loss, as the history relates, of an individual on the part of the Israelites, brought back the women and children as captives. The history thus proceeds: — “And Moses was wroth with the commanders of the host and said, Why have ye saved all the women alive? Lo! they, by the counsel of Balaam, caused the children of Israel to offend Jehovah in the business of Peor, so that there was a plague among the people of Jehovah. Now, therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and every female not a virgin; but the female children that are virgins keep for yourselves.”†

If we receive the Pentateuch as authentic, the lot of the

* It is not necessary to dwell on the narrative of the “ten plagues of Egypt.” Little more, perhaps, can be said than what appears at first sight, to show its improbability; and as little, it seems to me, to remove or palliate this improbability.

† Numbers, Ch. xxxi.

female children who were permitted, certainly not in mercy, to survive the butchery of their mothers, and of every male among the little ones, — the lot, I say, of these female captives may be judged of by the manners of the times, by the habits which the perpetration of such acts must have produced in the Israelites, by the law respecting female slaves, given in Deuteronomy,* and by the little probability that even the conditions of this law would be respected.†

THE command for the destruction of the Canaanites is

* Ch. xxi. 10, seqq.

† Bishop Watson, however, in his "Apology for the Bible" (Letter III.), says, — "I see nothing in this proceeding but good policy combined with mercy." This remark is followed by some ill-advised declamation. The coarse writer (Paine), against whom he professes to argue, had said, that the Midianitish virgins "were consigned to debauchery by the order of Moses." "Prove this," says the Bishop, "and I will allow that the Bible is what you call it, — a book of lies, wickedness, and blasphemy." The promised concession is equally liberal and injudicious. As a matter of fair statement, the word "debauchery" is objectionable, from its association with modern manners and sentiments. But, if we receive the Pentateuch as authentic, the difference between the actual lot of the Midianitish virgins, and what it is represented to have been by the use of that word, is very narrow and unsafe ground on which to peril the whole credibility of revealed religion.

It may be said in defence of the Jews, that their conduct toward the Midianites was not more barbarous than that of other ancient nations in their wars with each other. This defence might be admitted, if the massacre, according to the account, had not been perpetrated by the express order of Moses, in opposition to the more humane purpose of the army and its leaders. As the case now stands, this apology implies the proposition, that Moses was commissioned by God to sanction and perpetuate the barbarism of his age.

expressed in the following words, remarkable for their comprehensive brevity : — “ Of the cities of these people thou shalt save nothing alive that breathes.” * Of the objections to the credibility of the Pentateuch, theologians seem to have particularly selected for answer this command, and to have labored to show that it is reconcilable with the character of God. It is said that the destruction of the Canaanites is analogous to those cases in which God appoints a city to be swallowed up by an earthquake, or a nation to be ravaged by a pestilence, without distinction of sex or age. Undoubtedly the law of nature, that is, the merciful law of God, that all must die, takes effect daily upon many thousands of individuals, old men, women, and infants, as well as those able for war. But this obvious truth does not serve to reconcile us to the present account. The ordinary operations of God’s providence are not to be confounded with what is represented to have been a miraculous infliction of his vengeance. According to the history, the extirpation of the Canaanites was a terrible punishment from God for their abominable vices and idolatry ; but no account can be given, why the Deity should manifest himself to his creatures as inflicting punishment indiscriminately on the innocent and guilty ; as an Oriental despot exterminates a family for the offences of its head. But there is more than this to be considered.

The destruction of the Canaanites is to be regarded not merely as the act of God, if ordered by him, but likewise as the act of those who were the appointed instruments of his will, the chosen people, the sole depositaries of true religion and morals. It is said that the object of their being

* Deut. xx. 16.

appointed the executioners of the decree was to impress them with the deepest horror of the idolatry and vices of the Canaanites. It is difficult to believe that any one can give this answer without a strong suspicion of its unsoundness. The effect of their appointment as executioners must have been to convert them into a horde of ferocious and brutal barbarians. It cannot be imagined that they would have any feelings connected with the performance of a moral or religious duty in the massacre of enemies between whom and themselves there existed the utmost hatred that could be produced by a war of extermination, a war which must have seemed to the Canaanites wholly unprovoked and unjustifiable. There is no good moral discipline in the butchery of women and infants. It is not thus that men are to be formed to the service of God. The origin of the supposed direction on which we have been remarking is to be found in the traditionary enmity of the Jews to the Canaanites, and in the ferocity of ancient warfare. The Jews, sharing in the barbarism of the world, reflected back their own character upon Moses and upon God.

III. I WILL not enter into the detail of the various precepts and laws, moral, ceremonial, and civil, which are blended together in the Pentateuch without arrangement and with much repetition. Concerning many of them, it is incredible that they should have proceeded from the Deity. It is painful and disgusting to associate the distinguishing rite of the Jews with the idea of its having been solemnly appointed by God, and of its having been enforced in the manner related in the story respecting the circumcision of the sons of Moses.* — Nothing can render it probable that

* Exodus iv. 24 - 26.

a law proceeded from God, according to which a man who murdered his male or female slave by beating was to escape with impunity, if the slave did not die under his hands, but survived for a day or two, — with the reason given for it, — “For the slave was his property.”* — Can any one, at the present day, persuade himself that he is to refer to the Deity laws such as the following? — “A man or a woman who has a familiar spirit, or is a diviner, shall surely be put to death”; † “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live”; ‡ —

* Exodus xxi. 20, 21. — But with this law of the Jewish people may be compared that which Plato gives in relation to the same subject in his imaginary scheme of a perfect code of laws, — “Should any man kill a slave, if it be his own, let him purify himself.” (De Legibus, Lib. IX. p. 868.) The master was to be subject to no punishment, if he performed a religious expiation. Other laws follow respecting slaves, proposed by Plato, which are shocking to humanity.

The Levitical Law, like the whole Pentateuch, is to be viewed under two aspects. It is to be regarded, on the one hand, in reference to such a code as might, in our apprehension, be worthy of God; and, on the other hand, it is to be compared with such laws, and such conceptions of justice, as actually existed among heathen nations. When thus compared, there are in the laws respecting persons and property what may seem clear traces of the effects of that divine dispensation which the Jews had enjoyed, appearing in a higher sense of justice and humanity. The laws respecting slaves, generally, notwithstanding that above quoted, provided for their security and welfare in a manner unknown among the Greeks or Romans. Among the Romans, till the time of the Emperors, a master had absolute power over his slave, unchecked, or rather unnoticed, by any law, so that he might put him to death by torture; and this power, as we may readily believe, was sometimes horribly abused. Nor does the condition of slaves in Greece appear, in general, to have been less unhappy. How they were regarded at Athens may be judged of by the laws proposed by Plato.

† Leviticus xx. 27.

‡ Exodus xxii. 18. See also Deuteronomy xviii. 9-12. — It has

laws which have been the main support of one of the most debasing and cruel superstitions by which the Christian world has been disgraced. — We have seen that there is, properly speaking, no historical evidence for the genuineness of the Pentateuch. What, it may be asked, is the amount of evidence which would render the question worth discussing, Whether it be true or not, that “the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, Of birds ye shall have these in abomination ; they are not to be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, the vulture, the osprey, the falcon, kites of every kind, ravens of every kind,” &c. ; or that these and other similar injunctions should have been thus enforced : — “Ye shall not make yourselves abominable by eating any creeping reptile, nor make yourselves unclean and defiled thereby. For I Jehovah am your God. Ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy, for I am holy.” * To teach men, in the most solemn manner, that to refrain from particular kinds of food is essential to holiness, must tend only to pervert all their conceptions of holiness, duty, and God. The prohibition becomes more strange when we find articles of food enumerated to which nothing but the extremity of hunger could induce men to have recourse. — It is unnecessary to observe, that there

been contended by some in modern times, that these laws do not sanction the belief in witchcraft, but were directed only against impostors, falsely pretending to magical powers. But if such individuals had been meant, they would have been designated according to their true character as impostors, not in language which conveyed the idea, as plainly as any language could do, that their pretences were well founded. The belief in magic appears to have been universal in the ancient world. Such laws as we find in the Pentateuch had their origin in this belief, and could not be understood but as confirming it.

* Leviticus, Ch. xi.

are many of the Jewish laws on which delicacy forbids one to comment.*

THE general aspect of the Jewish religion, as it appears in the books of the Pentateuch, may lead to the conclusion, that, at the time of the compilation of those books, the original doctrine of Moses had been greatly corrupted. The multiplication of trifling and burdensome ceremonies has been in every other case the result of low and very false notions of religion. The observance of such rites has been made a substitute for moral goodness, and in proportion as they have been considered as important in the view of God has the regard of men been withdrawn from all that constitutes real worth. The state in which our Saviour found the religion of the Jews, upon his appearance on earth, seems a natural consequence of the belief that the Levitical Law had been ordained by God ; while, on the other hand, the tendency to such a state may be supposed

* No considerations of this kind, however, restrained the learned Michaelis from discussing them at length. Of his "Commentaries on the Laws of Moses," originally delivered in lectures to his pupils at Göttingen, it is not speaking too harshly to say, that its most striking characteristics are silliness and obscenity. Of the proper application of the latter term there can be no doubt ; as to the former, I know of none beside so well suited to express the frivolous gossip, and the wretched attempts at reasoning, with which the work abounds. The historian Müller says of Michaelis, whose lectures he attended when a young man, that he was " *homme d'esprit d'ailleurs et très-savant ; mais qui par sa manière burlesque de traduire et de commenter les poèmes des sages et des inspirés du peuple hébreu, en rendit pour quelque temps la lecture insoutenable à son disciple.*" (*Lettres de Jean de Müller, précédées de sa Vie*, p. xv.) Without doubt, such instructors were one cause of the deplorable state of religious speculation that has in our day existed in Germany.

to have done much gradually to produce and strengthen this belief. We may, perhaps, compare those representations of Christianity which were given during the darkest period of the Romish superstition with that which the Pentateuch affords of the religion of Moses. The existence of the Gospels alone prevented the history of Christ from becoming equally fabulous with that of the Jewish prophet. Some of the apocryphal gospels, as those of the Infancy (as they are called), show the strong tendency to this result.

THE views just given respecting the Levitical Law are confirmed by much that is found in the Pentateuch itself, and in other books of the Old Testament; but especially by the representations given in some of the Psalms, and in the earlier prophetic books. The authors of those writings insist in the strongest terms on moral goodness as the recommendation to God's favor, and dwell on the worthlessness of ritual observances. They use language which is apparently irreconcilable with the supposition, that they recognized the Levitical Law as appointed by God, or the history contained in the Pentateuch as authentic. To this subject we will next attend.

SECTION VI.

On the Views of Religion presented in the Writings of the Jewish Prophets, and in the Psalms, compared with those found in the Pentateuch.

It has been remarked, as affording evidence that the Pentateuch was not the work of Moses, that its authority

is not appealed to by the Jewish Prophets, the public teachers of religion among the Jews. But the writings of the higher class of Prophets furnish evidence more direct to establish the same conclusion.

THE religion inculcated in the Pentateuch consists very much in rites, and especially in offerings and sacrifices. The precepts concerning rites are multiplied, reiterated, and enforced in the most solemn manner. But by the Prophets *before the Captivity* such observances are spoken of in the most disparaging terms. The language in which our Saviour has been supposed to have *repealed* the Levitical Law is not more full and explicit. But those Prophets had no authority to repeal that Law. Their language, therefore, proves that they did not recognize such observances as enforced by God, and, consequently, that they knew nothing of the Pentateuch as the work of Moses. Their spirit is wholly different from that which appears in the Levitical Law. They insist in the strongest terms upon moral goodness as the sole recommendation to God's favor.

But it may be said, that the Prophets are to be understood as disparaging the observance of the ceremonial Law only when such observance was made a substitute for higher duties, or was practised by habitual transgressors; and were, therefore, far from teaching that a strict regard to its rites, as ordained by God, was not in the highest degree obligatory.

This may appear at first view a plausible explanation of much of their language. But it is to be recollected, that, if the Law proceeded from God, then the observance of the rites of the Law was a most solemn duty, taking its rank, so far as the Jews were concerned, with the clearest of

those obligations which are imperative upon all men. The explanation given, therefore, supposes that the Prophets spoke contemptuously of one duty in order to excite men to perform other duties ; that they treated with disrespect what God had commanded in order to lead men to obey his will. On the supposition, that the Levitical Law was ordained by God, the Jews offered sacrifices, and observed the other rites of that Law, because they believed them to have been commanded by God, and with the view of obtaining his favor. Thus far they acted right ; and they were not to be reprov'd and discouraged in doing right, whatever, on the other hand, might be their deficiencies and sins. But, further than this, if there were no intrinsic moral worth in the ceremonies of the Law, then they could have been ordained only as means of holiness ; and the absence of holiness in the people afforded no reason for repelling them from the appointed means of obtaining it. According to the representations of the Jewish history, they could hardly, at any time, have been a more perverse and disobedient race than their ancestors on whom those ceremonies were enjoined. It would therefore seem, that those who have acquiesced in the explanation that has been mentioned can have done so only through unconsciously transferring to the Prophets their own secret and unacknowledged sense, unacknowledged even to themselves, of the worthlessness of the rites of the Levitical Law. The observance of them, it is agreed, did not constitute holiness ; nor can it appear a suitable means of attaining it, if, as the explanation supposes, actual holiness was necessary to render such observance any thing but a matter of reprehension.

To illustrate the subject, let us imagine that the practices at one time in high repute in the Romish Church,

fasting, the scourging of one's self, other self-inflicted sufferings, and the iteration of forms of prayer, all which were supposed to be conformable to the will of God, had been in fact expressly and most solemnly enjoined by him. It is evident, that no preacher of true religion, under a conviction that such was the fact, could, by way of reforming the Roman Catholic Church, even when fallen into its most corrupt state, have spoken of those practices contemptuously, or have made a disparaging comparison of them with other duties which he was recommending, or have ventured, through any license of rhetorical language, to represent them as not ordained and not required by God. The application of this imaginary case to the real case before us is too obvious to be dwelt upon.

With these general views let us consider some of the passages that occur in the writings of the Prophets and in the Psalms.

THE prophet Amos ascribes these words to Jehovah.*

" I hate, I despise your feasts ;
I have no delight in your solemn assemblies ;
When ye offer me burnt-offerings and flour-offerings,
I will not accept them ;
Nor will I look on the peace-offerings of your fatlings.
Away with the noise of your songs :
I will not listen to your harping :
But let justice flow as water,
And righteousness like a mighty river.
Did ye offer me sacrifices and offerings
In the wilderness, for forty years, O house of Israel ? "

* Ch. v. 21 - 25.

Besides the general character of this passage, the concluding question may be particularly remarked. It is equivalent to a strong affirmation that the Israelites did not offer sacrifices and offerings during the forty years after their leaving Egypt. But this is directly contrary to what is related in the Pentateuch.

Nothing can be more striking than the following passage from Micah.*

“ ‘ With what shall I appear before Jehovah,
And bow myself before the Most High God ?
Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings,
With calves of a year old ?
Will Jehovah be pleased with thousands of rams,
Or ten thousands of rivers of oil ?
Shall I give my first-born for my transgression,
The fruit of my body for my sin ? ’
‘ O man ! he has made known to thee what is good :
And what does Jehovah require of thee,
But to do justly, and to love mercy,
And to walk humbly before thy God ? ’ ”

I PASS to the prophet Isaiah.†

“ Of what value are the multitude of your sacrifices to me ? says Jehovah.
I am weary of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts ;
And I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of goats.

* Ch. vi. 6-8.

† Ch. i. 11-17.

Who hath required this of you, when ye come to appear before me, to trample my courts ?
Bring no more vain oblations.

Wash you ; make you clean ;
Put away your evil deeds from before my eyes ;
Cease to do evil ; learn to do well ;
Seek to do justice ; relieve the oppressed ;
Do right to the fatherless ; defend the cause of the widow."

THE following passage is from Jeremiah.* It may be remarked, that it was written after the discovery, as represented, of "the Book of the Law," in the reign of Josiah, and the events immediately consequent.

"Thus says Jehovah, God of hosts, God of Israel :
Put your burnt-offerings with your sacrifices, and eat the flesh ;
For I spake not to your fathers,
Nor commanded them, in the day when I brought them out of Egypt,
Concerning burnt-offerings and sacrifices.
But this did I command them, saying,
Obey my voice, and I will be your God,
And ye shall be my people."

"I spake not to your fathers, when I brought them out of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings and sacrifices." With what astonishment must this declaration have been listened to by a contemporary Jew, believing the history in the

* Ch. vii. 21 - 23.

Pentateuch, and consequently believing that the ceremonial Law was ordained by God. And with what feelings would he have regarded the Prophet, if, upon questioning him as to his meaning, he had explained himself as he has been most plausibly explained by modern commentators, in words like these: — I did not mean to say, that God had “appointed no religious rites, such as sacrifices. For the most particular directions are given concerning them in the books of Moses.” But I only intended, that God had “always laid less stress upon every thing of this kind than upon moral virtue.” *

In the Pentateuch, Jehovah is repeatedly introduced as saying, — “I am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of fathers upon children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.” † With this declaration may be compared the eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel.

“The word of Jehovah came to me again, saying: —

“What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are on edge’?”

“As I live, saith the Lord, Jehovah, Ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel.

The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, nor shall the father bear the iniquity of the son.

“The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.”

* The words marked as quoted are taken from Dr. Priestley’s note on the passage. I quote him only because he has expressed briefly and distinctly what has been said by many others.

† Exod. xx. 5; xxxiv. 7. Numbers xiv. 18. Deut. v. 9.

According to the Talmud, there was a discussion among the ancient Jewish doctors about allowing the book now ascribed to Ezekiel a place in the canon, and the majority were at one time disposed to reject it. Their objections to it were founded, it is said, upon passages contained in it, which were regarded as contradictory to the Pentateuch.*

It seems, from the book ascribed to him, that Ezekiel wrote during the Captivity. It is a work which is not to be generally referred to as presenting correct or agreeable representations of religion or of the Supreme Being. It is made repulsive by other characteristics beside its great obscurity. If the last nine chapters were written by him, it would appear that his mind was much occupied about ritual observances. But, putting aside what in these chapters it is difficult or impossible to understand, one striking fact presents itself. It is the want of correspondence between the directions for sacrifices there given and those found in the Pentateuch.†

WITH such passages as have been adduced from the Prophets may be connected the remarkable quotation before given from one of the Psalms.‡ And there is a special reason for adding to them the declaration ascribed to God by Hosea.§

“ I desire goodness and not sacrifices,
And the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings.”

* Bartolocci Biblioth. Hebr. P. II. pp. 847, 848. Wolfi Biblioth. Hebr. Tom. II. p. 156.

† Compare, for example, the forty-fifth and forty-sixth chapters of Ezekiel with the twenty-eighth and twenty-ninth chapters of Numbers.

‡ See p. lxxxii.

§ Ch. vi. 6.

"Go ye and learn," said our Saviour, "what this means, *I desire goodness and not sacrifices.*"* By thus adopting and sanctioning the declaration of the Prophet, he bore testimony that the true character and spirit of the religion of Moses were not to be found in the ritual Law, but that they were identical, as far as that declaration extends, with the spirit and character of his own. He places the Prophet for a moment on a level with himself, as equally with himself rejecting the conception, that ceremonial observances were a means of obtaining God's favor.

SUCH passages as we have been considering may be thrown into stronger relief by comparing them with what appears in a later writer, who is to be referred to the same general class with those from whom we have quoted. Malachi was the last of the Prophets, or, in other words, the last of those public religious teachers among the Jews to whom that name has been given. He lived, as is commonly thought, about a century after the return of the Jews to Palestine, that is, about four hundred years before Christ, when the authority of the ceremonial Law was established. His language in relation to it does not correspond with that of the Prophets before the Captivity, but by its contrast it brings out in a more striking manner the character of those religious sentiments which they express, and serves to confirm the opinion, that the Levitical Law, in its present form, was not believed to be of divine authority among the Jews till after their return from their Captivity. Nothing answering to such passages as the following is to be found in any writer before that time.

* Matthew ix. 13.

“ But ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name ?
Ye bring polluted food to my altar.
Yet ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee ?
In that ye say, The table of Jehovah is despicable.
For when ye bring blind animals for sacrifice, ye say,
It is not evil.
And when ye bring lame and sick animals, ye say,
It is not evil.” *

“ Ye bring what has been plundered, and what is lame
and sick,
And present it for an offering.
Shall I accept it from your hands ? says Jehovah.
Cursed be the deceiver who has a male in his flock,
And vows and sacrifices to Jehovah what is marred.” †

“ Shall a man rob God ?
Yet he rob me.
But ye say, In what have we robbed thee ?
In tithes and offerings.
Ye are cursed with a curse ;
For ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.
Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse,
And let there be food in my house.” ‡

WITH these representations of the Deity we may compare those of an earlier writer, the author of the fiftieth Psalm.

“ Not for the sake of thy sacrifices will I reprove thee,
Nor of thy burnt-offerings, which are ever before me.

* Ch. i. 6-8.

† Ch. i. 13, 14.

‡ Ch. iii. 8-10.

I will take no bullock from thy stalls,
 Nor he-goat from thy folds ;
 For all the beasts of the forest are mine,
 And the cattle on a thousand hills.
 I know all the birds of the mountains ;
 And the wild beasts of the plains are before me.
 If I were hungry, I would not tell thee ;
 For the world is mine, and all that is therein.
 Do I eat the flesh of bulls,
 Or drink the blood of goats ?
 Offer to God thanksgiving,
 And fulfil thy vows to the Most High ;
 Then call upon me in the day of trouble,
 And I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." *

In such passages appears, as I conceive, the true spirit
 of the religion which Moses was commissioned to teach ;

* In the next Psalm (the fifty-first), a psalm expressing deep penitence in the writer, is the following passage : —

"Thou desirest not sacrifice ; else would I give it ;

Thou dost not delight in burnt-offerings.

The sacrifice which God loves is a broken spirit ;

A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

I notice this passage principally to observe, that there seems little doubt that the two verses which follow it are (as has been supposed) an addition by a later writer, after the Captivity. They not only have no connection with what precedes, but they stand in direct opposition to what has just been said by the original author. The verses referred to are these : —

"Do good to Zion according to thy mercy ;

Build up the walls of Jerusalem ;

Then shalt thou be pleased with right sacrifices,

With whole burnt-offerings :

Then shall bullocks be offered on thine altar."

and it is remarkable that this spirit survived the belief that the Levitical Law was ordained by God through him. Religious sentiments, coincident with those which have been quoted from the earlier prophetic writings and the Psalms, are to be found in the higher class of Jewish writers of later times. Thus, the author of Ecclesiasticus says : — *

“ He who keeps the Law,” (a remarkable expression, as defining what might be meant by “ keeping the Law ”) — “ He who keeps the Law abounds in offerings ; he who gives heed to the commandments offers a peace-offering ; he who returns a favor makes an offering of fine flour ; he who gives alms offers a thank-offering ; he who departs from wickedness is accepted by the Lord ; and to forsake iniquity is a sin-offering.”

If inserted in any part of Leviticus, what a contrast would this passage form with the general tenor of that book ! It is remarkable, likewise, as showing what, in the view of the writer, was meant by “ keeping the Law ” ; that is to say, the performance of duties of universal obligation, exclusively of the observance of the ceremonial Law. As appears, however, from the passage itself, the ceremonial Law was fully established in his time ; and he accordingly subjoins, — “ Thou shalt not appear before the Lord with empty hands ; for all these things are to be done for the sake of the ordinances.”

The philosophical Jews of Alexandria appear to have laid little stress on the literal observance of the ritual Law, regarding all its precepts as symbolical. “ God,” says Philo, “ rejoices in devout affections, in men striving after holiness ; from whom he receives, well pleased, cakes, and

* Ch. xxxv. 1 – 3.

barley, and the humblest offerings, as of greater worth than the most costly ; and should they bring nothing else, yet making an offering of themselves, perfect in goodness, they would make the best offering, while celebrating God, the Benefactor and Preserver, in hymns of thanksgiving,"—some uttered, as he goes on to say, and some unuttered.*

A few words may be added from another passage of Philo :—“ True gratitude to God is not shown, as many think, in buildings, gifts, and sacrifices,—for not the whole world would be a worthy temple to his honor,—but in praises and hymns, not such as are sung with a loud voice, but such as sound forth in harmony from the invisible and most pure mind. To confer benefits is the proper office of God ; to be grateful, that of the creature, who has nothing but gratitude to give in return. For would he render any other gift he will find that it already belongs to the Maker of All, and not to the being who brings it. Being instructed, therefore, that there is but one thing for us to do in honoring God,—to be grateful,—about this let us, at all times and everywhere, be solicitous.”†

THE continuance and the strength of similar sentiments, among a portion of the Jews, are strikingly manifested by the existence of the sect of the Essenes, and the manner in which they were spoken of. They are described by Philo and Josephus as the most conscientious and religious of their countrymen. It may be observed, though it is not to our immediate purpose, that their religion and morality were of

* *De Victimis Offerentibus*. Opp. II. 253.

† *De Plantatione Noë*. Opp. I. 348.

an ascetic and monastic character. Their virtues were those which, in other times, have been produced among Christians as the growth of strong principles in a very corrupt state of society; in such a state of society as may incline those who would attain the religious character to separate themselves from the world, and, in renouncing its pleasures, to neglect many of its duties. But the Essenes, as I have said, were the most virtuous among their countrymen in the view even of Philo; and this sect, so regarded by him and by Josephus, offered no sacrifices. "They send gifts to the temple," says Josephus, "but offer no sacrifices; their modes of purification being different; and hence, being excluded from the common sanctuary, they offer themselves as a sacrifice." * And he goes on to say, that "they deserve admiration above all those who have cultivated virtue." † "Among them," says Philo, "are especially to be found worshippers of God, men who sacrifice no animals, but deem it their duty to sanctify their own minds." ‡ How was it that Philo and Josephus thus celebrated the religious character of men who, if the Levitical Law proceeded from God, neglected his positive commands? Neither has expressed, nor is it probable that either felt, any doubt that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, and that the ritual Law proceeded from God. Philo's system of allegorizing might have enabled him to explain away the whole obvious meaning of its commands concerning sacrifices; but he has not done so in his writings. The answer, therefore, it would seem, is, partly at least, to be found in the general fact, that prevalent

* ἐφ' αὐτῶν τὰς θυσίας ἐπιτελοῦσι.

† Antiq. Jud. Lib. XVIII. c. 1. § 5.

‡ Quod liber sit quisquis virtuti studet. Opp. II. 457.

errors are often acquiesced in, and even, when directly called in question, zealously defended, by individuals who do not attend to their necessary bearing, on whose prevailing habits of thought and feeling they have very little influence, and who hold truths wholly irreconcilable with them.

THERE are, then, two very different aspects under which the religion of Moses appears. One is that which is presented in the ritual Law; the other is that which is found in portions of the Pentateuch, in the higher class of writers of the Old Testament, who, as we have seen reason to think, lived before the belief prevailed that the ritual Law came from God, and even in the higher class of Jewish writers of after times. The spirit of the Jewish religion, as represented by them, is coincident with the spirit of the religion of Christ.

The general conclusion seems to be, that the revelation of God through Moses was made at so remote a period, that no contemporary or early history of it remains, — though imperishable monuments of it exist in the effects which it produced; and that there was nothing, in this communication of God to a peculiar people, — I do not say contrary to the spirit of the religion of Christ, for this it would be absurd to suppose, — but that there was nothing in it which the great messenger of God to the whole world was called upon or commissioned to abrogate. He came not “to annul the Law and the Prophets,” — that is, the true religion of Moses, — but to “perfect.” There was an opposition between his religion and the contemporary religion of the Jews, that very corrupt religion which had gradually been formed in their nation; but certainly no opposition between his religion and that of Moses,

if, as we believe, Moses was like him a messenger from God.

SECTION VII.

On the Inferences respecting the Levitical Law and the Pentateuch, to be drawn from the Teaching and Actions of our Saviour.

THE ritual Law was done away by Christianity; or, in other words, it was not binding upon Jewish Christians. Of the distinguishing rite of the Jews St. Paul says to the Galatians, — "In Jesus Christ," that is, in Christianity, "neither circumcision avails any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith, showing itself by love";* and he reiterates the declaration at the very close of the Epistle. — Philo speaks of the law respecting the Jewish Sabbath, as "that most holy and awful law." He relates, that a governor of Egypt, in his time, had endeavoured to compel the Jews to violate it, thinking, that, if this could be effected, it would lead them to abandon all their peculiar customs, and neglect all the ordinances of their religion.† St. Paul says, — "One man regards one day more than another; another man regards every day alike. Let each be fully satisfied in his own mind. He who regards the day regards it as a servant of the Lord; and he who regards not the day regards it not as a servant of the Lord."‡ He is speaking of the observance of the Jewish Sabbath, as an ordinance of the Levitical Law. —

* Galatians v. 6.

† De Somniis. Opp. I. 675.

‡ Romans xiv. 5, 6.

We have seen how solemnly the distinction was enforced in this Law between clean and unclean food. "I know," says St. Paul, and am satisfied, as a disciple of Jesus our master, "that there is nothing unclean in itself; but to him who thinks any thing unclean it is unclean." * This is but a very small part of the evidence which his Epistles afford, that he did not consider the Levitical Law as binding upon Christians.

What view he himself entertained of its origin, and of the authorship of the Pentateuch, would be an interesting and curious inquiry, but it is foreign from our present purpose. The Apostles, generally, appear to have long held the prevailing opinions of their countrymen respecting the Law, and probably their minds were always more or less affected by them. It was not till many years after the death of our Saviour that they were satisfied by an express revelation that the ritual Law was not to be imposed on the Gentile converts. By the great body of Jewish converts it continued to be observed, and its authority to be zealously maintained. St. Paul, it is evident from the New Testament, incurred much odium among the Jewish believers from his assertion of the truth.

BUT, if the ritual Law were not binding upon Christians, the question arises, upon what ground it was abrogated. Was it, as has been represented, solemnly ordained by God through Moses, and as solemnly annulled by God through Christ? Or was it a law of human growth, a system of superstitious observances, opposed in character and spirit to Christianity, and therefore a system the error of which was involved in the truth of our religion?

* Romans xiv. 14.

Had the ritual Law been, as represented in the Pentateuch, promulgated by God, it is evident that the obligation of the Jews to obey that law could not cease till it was explicitly and solemnly repealed by God. But we find nowhere any declaration of our Saviour recognizing its divine origin, and asserting his commission from God to declare it no longer binding. One of two inferences necessarily follows; either that the law remained binding upon his followers from among the Jews, contrary to what is affirmed by St. Paul, and contrary, as we shall see, to what he himself taught by his actions and words, or that this law did not proceed from God, and therefore that no express declaration was necessary to invalidate its authority.

BUT it may be asked, on the other hand, Why did not our Saviour explicitly declare the fact, if the ritual Law was a system of human superstition? The question, in other words, is this:— Why did he not outrage to the uttermost the prejudices of those whom he called upon to be his followers? Many errors connected with religion, of more or less importance, were entertained by his hearers, which he did not undertake to correct. All truth could not be communicated to men so unprepared for, or rather so opposed to, the reception of the few great truths which it was his office to communicate. The revelation from God was not given to do the whole work of human reason on all subjects connected with religion. To imagine the possibility of such a revelation, man's nature and condition continuing as they are, is to imagine an absurdity; for it is to suppose a constant miraculous illumination of all individual minds, extending over so wide a sphere of facts and opinions as to embrace all the more important objects

of thought. The attention of his hearers was to be fixed on those fundamental principles of religion that immediately concern the essential and eternal interests of man, and which it was the purpose of his ministry to announce on the authority of God. From those principles their minds were not to be distracted to the consideration of minor topics, which, however important, were incomparably less important. Had he undertaken to correct all the wrong opinions of the Jews, more or less connected with religion, a cloud of misrepresentations, misunderstandings, and controversies would have arisen, obscuring the whole of his teaching. That, in order to accomplish the great purpose of his mission, it was necessary for Jesus to refrain from directly opposing many gross errors of his countrymen, is a fact to be constantly kept in view in considering his history. I have elsewhere endeavoured to illustrate it more fully.*

BUT it may be further said, that our Saviour not only did not oppose, but that he asserted and sanctioned, the belief of the Jews concerning the Pentateuch and the Levitical Law. There are passages, fewer perhaps than is commonly thought, which would support this proposition, supposing that Jesus had been addressing a body of enlightened and unprejudiced men, and that, moreover, we could be assured that his words were reported with verbal accuracy.

The general spirit and meaning of our Saviour's teaching, as recorded in the Gospels, is free from all uncertainty. If we receive it as the teaching of a divine

* "Statement of Reasons for not believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians," Appendix, p. 313, seqq.

messenger, it leaves no doubt concerning the fundamental truths of religion,—the being of God, God's care for men, and man's immortality and moral responsibility. But in the words ascribed to him we sometimes meet with difficulties, not affecting the clearness with which those truths were taught, but preventing us from readily or certainly ascertaining the precise purport and bearing of what he said in relation to topics incidentally presented.

Among the various causes by which this uncertainty is produced, there is one perfectly obvious and indisputable, though it has been less regarded, perhaps, than any other. It is, that his words are not always given with verbal accuracy by the different historians of his ministry. We need not recur to any reasoning to show that this fact is in the highest degree probable. The cases in which the Evangelists unquestionably intended to report the same words of Jesus, but in which they differ from each other in their reports, render it certain. It follows that there must be passages, where, to determine the exact meaning that was expressed by our Saviour, we cannot take the precise words of some one of the Evangelists as an infallible guide. When we meet with a difficulty that cannot otherwise be fully solved, the consideration that the reporter may have varied the expression used by Jesus, should enter into our explanation.

Now such unintentional errors, more or less affecting the sense, were most likely to occur on subjects concerning which strong prejudices existed among the Jews, that had moulded their forms of language, if they were prejudices that Jesus did not directly oppose. Every one easily slides into the language of a popular error, or rather we may find

it difficult to avoid such language, when not expressly contending against the error. But on the supposition, that the Evangelists had not decidedly renounced the opinions of their countrymen respecting the Pentateuch and the Levitical Law, we cannot doubt that they might unconsciously attribute to Jesus incidental expressions favoring those opinions ; — that they might have done so in cases, where, if his precise words had been compared with their report of them, they would not have recognized any important difference of character or effect between his language and their own.

The unquestionable fact, that the words of our Saviour are not always reported with perfect correctness, is to be kept in view in studying the history of his ministry. It may not lead us to reject any declaration ascribed to him, as not founded on what he actually said, or as not, in its *essential* meaning, true ; but it may enter as one element into our explanation of certain passages. It is sometimes evident that it must enter into our explanation ; for it sometimes appears, from a comparison of the Evangelists with one another, that the report of our Saviour's language, which we find in one of them, is defective, or otherwise incorrect, and therefore that this report must be explained with reference to the fact that it is so.

THE general principle of explanation just stated deserves consideration, doubtless, in relation to some of the words ascribed to Jesus, that have been thought to express or imply his opinions concerning the origin of the Pentateuch and the Levitical Law. It may, as I have said, enter as one element into their explanation. But we may question how far it is necessary to resort to it, considering that another fact is to be attended to. This is, that our Saviour,

on some subjects, and on some occasions, adopted the common language of the Jews, founded on their erroneous conceptions, certainly without any design of sanctioning those conceptions. — He sometimes did so for the purpose of changing the meaning of the terms by giving them a new application. Thus, the Jews, under the name of “the kingdom of Heaven,” expected an earthly kingdom, of which the Messiah was to be the monarch. The idea of such a kingdom alone was excited in their minds, when Jesus announced that the kingdom of Heaven was at hand. But he used the term figuratively, in a very different sense, which was to be gradually explained by subsequent events. — Sometimes he used such language for the purpose of rhetorical illustration, which may be drawn either from fact or fable. “When an unclean spirit,” he said, “has gone out of a man, it passes through desert places in search of rest.”* No intelligent reader will suppose from these words, that our Saviour meant to adopt and sanction the then common notion, that desert places were frequented by demons. — At other times he is reasoning upon the false conceptions of those whom he addressed, reasoning *ad hominem*, as it is called. “If I cast out demons through Beëlzebub,” he said, “through whom do your disciples cast them out?”† There were some of the school of the Pharisees, it appears, who pretended to cast out demons by exorcism, and who, when they succeeded in producing a real or seeming return to sanity in their patients, were thought to have effected a great work. Our Saviour did not mean to imply that these men possessed powers like his own. The object of his question merely was to expose the prejudices and gross injustice of the

* Matthew xii. 43.

† Matthew xii. 27.

Pharisees, who believed that their disciples had, in the one particular in question, similar power to that of Christ, and who, in his case and theirs, regarded its exercise so differently. In such reasoning from false conceptions, the language of error is necessarily used. The character of such reasoning may be more or less obvious; and when not perfectly obvious, he who does not exercise his understanding, but looks only at the naked words before him, may insist that a speaker or writer means to affirm an error, which, in fact, he introduces into his discourse only to show its inconsistency with some other error, or as a temporary stepping-stone on the way to truth. — And, besides the occasions that have been mentioned, language founded on the mistaken conceptions of the Jews was employed by our Saviour, either for the sake of producing an effect on the imagination and feelings of his hearers, which could not have been produced, or could not have been produced so powerfully, in any other way, or of conveying some truth to their understandings, which they could not have distinctly apprehended, if expressed in any other form. Thus he spoke, for example, of moral evil, under the terrific personification of Satan. In such cases we must, and we may easily, distinguish his essential meaning from the modes of expression in which it is clothed, — modes of expression adapted to Jewish conceptions, but not correspondent to our own. Some of the truths taught by Jesus could not but receive an accidental coloring from the medium of the language through which they were conveyed, and we must not confound this accidental coloring with their essential nature.* But this subject admits some further explanation.

* The principle involved in the preceding remarks, that in explain-

EVERY language is conformed to the conceptions of those who use it, and consists wholly of the signs or expressions of their conceptions. The progress of knowledge makes necessary the enlargement of a language. The discoveries of modern chemistry, for example, have required a new vocabulary, in which they may be preserved and communicated. When, on any subject of wide extent, the conceptions of the generality of men are erroneous, their errors enter into the structure of their speech ; they are embodied in the words which they use. It is often necessary for him who would correct such errors to introduce new terms, or to give new senses, or a new application, to terms already in use. When circumstances do not require, or admit, that those errors should be controverted, the language in which they are incorporated may be used by one fully acquainted with the truth. It may often be employed with propriety and advantage. There are occasions when, by its use, right conceptions and feelings may be produced, which could not be communicated by language more correct. I understand (for it is a subject on which I am incapable of forming an independent opinion), that, at the present day, many of those qualified to judge reject the theory of the

ing the words of our Lord we should consider to whom they were immediately addressed, is equally implied in the following passage from Tertullian,—a very remarkable one, considering the time when it was written,—though he makes a different application of it : “ *Omnia quidem dicta Domini omnibus posita sunt ; per aures Judæorum ad nos transierunt ; sed pleraque in personas directa, non proprietatem admonitionis nobis constituerunt, sed exemplum.* ” — “ All the sayings of our Lord are meant for all ; they have passed to us through the ears of the Jews ; but many of them, being addressed to individuals, are not, for us, literal precepts, but exemplifications of duty.” *De Præscript. Hæretic.* c. 8. p. 205. *Conf. De Fugâ in Persecutione*, c. 13. pp. 542, 543.

emission of rays from luminous bodies, and regard the sensation of light as produced by the undulations of a luminous æther, as that of sound is caused by undulations of the air. Supposing this theory to be true, and that it should be universally received, the language which has been formed upon the old belief will not soon, if ever, cease to be the language of common life and of poetry. Though, upon the supposition just made, this language implies throughout what is contrary to the truth, yet it is equally well adapted to the expression of all truths that concern the generality of men, as language conformed to the correct theory. It will, at least for a long time, be better adapted to this purpose, as being more intelligible to the unlearned, — more conformed to the appearances, if not to the reality, of things. Nor can we, with our present associations, readily believe that a similar profusion of figures and imagery to that which poetry now borrows from light may be effectively addressed to men's imagination and feelings through the medium of other forms of language than those to which we are accustomed. So also in Chemistry; however requisite the new nomenclature may be for the purposes of science, it is unimportant, except indirectly, as regards the arts or medicine. The old terms might, in many cases, serve equally well for the practical purposes of life. We might continue to call one substance "the Oil of Vitriol," and another "the Sugar of Lead," and, notwithstanding the erroneous ideas suggested by those names, we might talk of them as intelligently, and explain their properties and uses as correctly, as if we denominated them "Sulphuric Acid," and "the Acetate of Lead"; and, in speaking to those familiar only with the former names, no one would hesitate to use them. Truth, then, may be clearly and effectually conveyed in the language of

error ; that is to say, in terms having their origin in erroneous conceptions, and adapted to the expression of those conceptions.

In the time of our Saviour, the notions of the Jews on many subjects connected with his preaching were false and superstitious. These notions were necessarily ingrained in their forms of speech. A philosophical language, in which they should be avoided, might undoubtedly have been formed by him ; and such a language might have been intelligible to the philosophers, if there were any philosophers, among the Jews. But our Saviour preached to the poor, he addressed multitudes, his immediate disciples were fishermen and taxgatherers, and others of no higher intellectual attainments, and he could use only popular language, such language as his hearers would understand and feel. He might, on a certain occasion, have said, I foresee the triumph of my religion over evil, moral and physical ; but, even had he been partially understood by his hearers, if they had had some notion of what was meant by "evil, moral and physical," and by "the triumph of his religion," the assertion would have passed over their minds as a shadowy abstraction, and left no impression. He did in fact say, with the same meaning, "I saw Satan falling like lightning from heaven" ; and, in so saying, he used imagery which was adapted to their conceptions and feelings. The whole phraseology of the Jews concerning the Pentateuch and the other books of the Old Testament was moulded on their erroneous opinions respecting those books. Our Saviour might have avoided the use of it, and introduced new modes of speech, conformed to the truth. In this case, it is probable that he would have abundantly excited their attention. Such a fundamental change in their religious language would have exposed him to questioning.

Pharisees would have come "to try him" on the subject. What would have been the effect, if he had declined to explain himself? What would have been the consequences, if he had explained himself? In the latter case, unless God had seen fit to use other means than he did for establishing truth among men, the whole ministry of Jesus might have been wasted, and he might have died a martyr to an ineffectual attempt to correct the false opinions of his countrymen in relation to the Old Testament and the Levitical Law. What he did do, that is, what the circumstances of his ministry permitted him to do, to manifest his sense of those errors, will appear hereafter.

ESSENTIAL truths, then, may be clearly and effectually, sometimes most effectually, conveyed in the language of error. It is true, that one writing at the present day on any subject of morals or religion, who may suppose himself to be addressing intelligent and well-informed readers, is bound, as far as possible, to avoid such language, when it may occasion any mistake as to his meaning. It is his duty to express himself with unequivocal distinctness. But such language, in regard to many topics, constituted the popular, or rather the only, language of the Jews; and our Saviour was placed in circumstances altogether different from those of a philosopher of our own times. That he might not distract the attention of his hearers from the great truths which it was the purpose of his mission to make known, that he might not uselessly alarm their prejudices and rouse their passions, he sometimes adopted their common language, though founded on error. We are not hence to consider him as sanctioning their errors. Such language, as used by him, is to be understood as we always understand the language of error when used by one whom

we believe fully to comprehend the truth, and to have no purpose but to express it. We view it as an adaptation of his thoughts to the conceptions of those whom he addresses; or as the presentation of ideas, essentially correct, in the only forms in which they have been embodied in language, though these forms may contain an alloy of error. In the teaching of our Saviour it is the essential meaning alone that is to be regarded. The form of expression may be an accident, resulting from temporary and local circumstances, from the character of those whom he immediately addressed, and, especially, from the nature of their conceptions and language.

THE facts that have been stated, in connection with those now generally recognized in the interpretation of the New Testament, may serve to explain the passages in which our Saviour has been thought to sanction the common opinions of the Jews respecting the origin of the Levitical Law and the authorship of the Pentateuch. I will notice, for the sake of illustration, one of those passages, perhaps the most remarkable. In the Gospel of John, our Saviour is represented as thus addressing his Jewish hearers:—
“Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; *for he wrote concerning me*”; that is, “what he wrote concerns me.”*

Here, it may be said, is an express assertion of our Saviour, that “Moses wrote”; and, if we will not raise an idle cavil, grounded on the supposition that Moses may have written a part, but not the whole, of the Pentateuch, we must admit him to have been its author, and consequently admit that the Levitical Law proceeded from God.

* John v. 46.

But, on the other hand, it may be remarked, that to affirm that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch is, obviously, not the main purpose of the passage. Its *essential* meaning is, Had ye received with true faith the religion taught by Moses, and had it produced its proper effect on your minds, ye would have received me ; for the dispensation by Moses concerned me ; it was intended as a preparation for me.

It is next to be considered, that, in regard to the *incidental* meaning supposed to be expressed by the passage as it now stands, it rests on a single word. If, instead of the words, "Moses *wrote* concerning me," our Saviour in fact said, "Moses *taught* concerning me," (that is, What Moses taught concerns me,) then the declaration, without any change in its *essential* meaning, would suggest no such inferences as have been drawn from it. In order, therefore, to draw those inferences from it, we should be certain that St. John reported his Master's language with verbal exactness. But it is not likely that he committed it to writing till many years after it was uttered ; and it is altogether probable, that, if, when he committed it to writing, the question had been proposed to him, whether our Saviour said "Moses wrote," or "Moses taught," or "Moses spoke," he would have been unable to solve the doubt. Nor is it unreasonable to suppose, that, of these expressions, all equally suitable to the *main purpose* of Jesus, he might not have remarked that there was reason for preferring one to another. It is to be recollected, that the fact is unquestionable, that the Evangelists did not always report the language of their Master with verbal exactness.

But, supposing that the words before us are the very words of our Saviour, how are we then to regard them ?

We may regard them as an address *ad hominem*, as an incidental and temporary adoption of the conceptions and language of those to whom he was speaking, in relation to a subject foreign from his immediate purpose. We may understand him as if he had said,—Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for the books which, *as you suppose*, Moses wrote, concern me. If it be asked, how those books concerned our Saviour, the answer is, that all the truths preserved in those books, derived from, or relating to, the revelation by Moses, concerned him for whom this dispensation was preparatory. Those books clearly taught that there was one God, the Creator of all things, ruling over all things, and exercising a moral government over men,—loving righteousness and hating iniquity. The foundation of all true religion was thus laid. He whose character had been formed on the belief of those truths was prepared to receive the truths taught by Jesus. The books preserving the traditions concerning Moses likewise presented in the strongest light the fact, that the Jews had been miraculously separated by God from other nations. The Jews believed, and reasonably believed, that this separation had been made for some great end, yet unaccomplished. They were expecting a new messenger from God to complete the work. This end was to be accomplished by Christ. He was the expected Messenger,—the Messiah. These, I conceive, are the reasons, why the books ascribed to Moses concerned him. Whatever mixture of error they might contain, they still preserved the traditions of that earlier dispensation, the main purpose of which was to prepare for his coming.

IN the wide field which is to be traversed in this investigation, we are led to take different views of the

Pentateuch, but they are all perfectly reconcilable with each other. We must not estimate its value to a pious Jew before the coming of Christ, by the opinion which an enlightened Christian may now form of its authorship and its errors. To have broadly communicated such an opinion to the former, by way of enlightening his mind on the subject of religion, would have implied any thing but wisdom in his religious teacher. A pious Jew, perhaps, resolved its difficulties into allegories, or as commonly, it may be, passed over them without suffering his attention to dwell upon them, as intelligent Christians have done. There are, perhaps, but few men into whose system of opinions errors do not enter, irreconcilable with truths which they firmly hold, and such as might have a disastrous effect upon their character. But these errors often lie inert in the mind, unregarded, and inoperative on the feelings and conduct. He whose intentions are right has, at least under favorable circumstances, a moral corrective in his heart for his mistakes of speculation; or, in the inconsistency of his opinions, the true may neutralize the effects of the erroneous.

THERE are still other considerations to be attended to respecting the relation of Christianity to the Levitical Law. This law consists of two parts. It was both the ritual and the civil law of the Jews. On the one hand, it regulated the ceremonies of their national religion, and, on the other, it was their statute law concerning civil rights, crimes, and punishments. Now in the simple performance of the ceremonies ordained by it there was no moral harm. What it prescribed might be innocently complied with. Accordingly, we find that Jesus sometimes observed its ordinances, as in the celebration of the

Passover; and that they were regarded not only by the other Apostles, but occasionally also by St. Paul, when *to the Jews he became as a Jew*. But so far as the Levitical was the civil law of the nation, obedience to it was not merely innocent, it was a duty, binding upon the followers of Christ, equally with the rest of their countrymen. Thus, our Saviour says, — “The Teachers of the Law and the Pharisees sit on the seat of Moses,” that is, they expound and administer the laws of the nation, they exercise an authority similar to that once held by Moses; — “Whatever, therefore, they bid you observe, that observe and do”; * submit to their authority as ministers of the law, whatever may be their private vices. Thus, too, when reproving the Teachers of the Law and the Pharisees for their affected scrupulosity in paying tithes of mint, anise, and cummin, he said to them, — “These ought ye to do, and not to leave the other undone.” † It was a right principle, that the law was to be observed even in its minor requirements.

There was, as I have said, no moral harm simply in the observance of the rites of the Jewish religion by one who considered them as matters of indifference. But, on the supposition that these rites were not ordained by God, there can be no question that the tendency of such a system of ceremonies, regarded as an essential part of religion, was to strengthen, more and more, gross misconceptions of religion and of the religious character; and to produce that outward show of sanctity, accompanied by real depravity, which marked the general character of the Pharisees in the time of Christ. When the

* Matthew xxiii. 2, 3.

† Matthew xxiii. 23.

observance of ceremonies is raised to the same rank with the performance of duties, in the confusion that ensues, the former usually supersedes the latter. Men find it much easier to satisfy themselves concerning their religious character by doing certain definite acts that require no struggle with their evil passions, than by aiming at indefinite improvement, which demands constant humility, watchfulness, and self-control.

The ritual Law, as has been before remarked, was not solemnly repealed by our Saviour in the name of God, as if it had been solemnly promulgated by God; it fell before his teaching like a form of human superstition. The contrariety thus manifested between the character and spirit of his religion and the character and spirit of the ritual Law—the manner, in other words, in which this Law was done away by Christianity—shows that the common opinion of the Jews respecting its divine origin was not sanctioned by the teaching of our Saviour. But in relation to this subject there is more to be considered.

If Jesus had publicly and explicitly declared the error of the long-cherished belief of the Jews, such a storm of prejudice and passion would have been excited in the great body of the nation, and such confusion and bewilderment of mind would have been produced among those best disposed to listen to him, as would, to all human apprehension, have defeated the purpose of his ministry. It was a truth to be taught indirectly. But he did not leave it to be inferred only from the character of his religion. He gave other intimations of it, sufficiently intelligible. He went to the very limits, within which a divine wisdom restrained him, in bearing his testimony against the error of the Jews; and

this testimony, though its whole effect was not understood, was yet so offensive, that it could not be given but at the hazard of his life.

I refer to that language and those actions of our Saviour which distinctly imply that the Levitical Law was not of divine origin. In the investigation of this evidence an unexplored subject opens upon us.

It will be recollected in what terms Philo, who was no bigot for the literal observance of the Levitical Law, speaks of the Jewish Sabbath.* "Whoever does any work on the Sabbath shall surely be put to death," is a law repeatedly given in Exodus.† "Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your dwellings on the Sabbath."‡ In Numbers § we read that a man was found gathering sticks on the Sabbath; "and the Lord said to Moses, This man shall surely be put to death; the whole congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp." So strict, according to the Levitical Law, was to be the observance of the Sabbath, and so fearful a crime was any breach of the statute represented to be.

But Jesus repeatedly disregarded, or countenanced the disregard of the law respecting the Sabbath; and he did so at the hazard of his life. But it is not to be imagined that he thus manifested his disregard for that law wantonly, or that such hazard was encountered without the purpose of effecting some important end. What, then, could this end be, except to teach indirectly the superstitious character of such observances as the Levitical Law required, and especially of such represen-

* See before, p. cl.

† Exodus xxxv. 3.

‡ Ch. xxxi. 14. Ch. xxxv. 2.

§ Ch. xv. 32-36.

tations concerning the extreme guilt of neglecting them as that Law presented? Let us attend to some of the examples.

When, as he was passing through a field of grain on the Sabbath,* his disciples gathered the ears of grain and ate them, and the Pharisees said, "Lo! thy disciples are doing what the Law forbids on the Sabbath," his reply, it is to be observed, did not contradict their assertion. But, for the obvious reasons before given, he could not *directly* tell them that this Law was not from God, and was not binding upon men. What, then, did he say? He first made one of those annunciations of his high character and of the sanctity of his office which were so necessary to the accomplishment of his ministry. David, their great monarch, the supposed type of the Messiah, had broken the Law, when himself and his companions were hungry; and what David had done without censure he might do without censure. The priests performed their work in the Temple on the Sabbath, notwithstanding the Law; and those who addressed him were in the presence of "one greater than the Temple." In such declarations there is no recognition of the divine authority of the Law, and still less in what follows. "But, had ye known what this means, *I desire goodness and not sacrifices*, ye would not have condemned the guiltless." These words imply that such an observance of the Sabbath as the Law enforced in a manner so terrific had not been required by God, and was not acceptable to him. "For the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." The general truth involved in this declaration is, that what God requires man to do is for the benefit of man; he demands no slavish ob-

* Matthew xii. 1-8. Mark ii. 23-28. Luke vi. 1-5.

servance of mere ceremonies. "So that the Son of Man is master even of the Sabbath":—So that I, the messenger of God, have a right to dispense with such ceremonies.

Jesus repeatedly performed his miracles on the Sabbath, twice, as is related, in a synagogue.* To meet the offence of the Jews, at his thus breaking the rest of the day, he presented the same essential idea in different forms of expression. "Who among you that owns a sheep, if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more worth is a man than a sheep! It is lawful, then, to do good on the Sabbath." If our Saviour had attached any sanctity to the law respecting the ceremonial observance of the Sabbath; if it had not been his express purpose indirectly to show that he did not regard it as of divine origin, he might, and undoubtedly would, have deferred the performance of his miracle till another day. In justification of his conduct, he taught that all good works, even those for the relief of inferior animals, as the taking of a sheep from a pit, or the leading of an ox or an ass to water, might be performed on the Sabbath. The license which the Pharisees allowed themselves, in regard to the actions specified, precluded any ready reply to this doctrine. But how much they were outraged by what he did and what he taught appears from the narrative:—"Then the Pharisees went out and concerted means to destroy him."

Early in his ministry, at Jerusalem, by the pool of Bethesda, he restored to health one who had been a cripple for thirty-eight years, and directed him to rise, take up his bed,

* Matthew xii. 9-14. Mark iii. 1-6. Luke vi. 6-11. Luke xiii. 10-17.

and walk. This was done on the Sabbath. The Jews, in consequence, pursued Jesus with the purpose of killing him, "because he had done this on the Sabbath." * They were acting in conformity, as, doubtless, they thought, with the law in Exodus: — "Whoever does any work on the Sabbath shall surely be put to death." "After this Jesus would not, for some time, sojourn in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill him." † Afterward he went up to Jerusalem, at the feast of Tabernacles, and referred, in his first public discourse after his arrival, to the danger to which he had exposed himself by breaking through the ceremonial observance of the Sabbath. "Why do you seek to kill me?" he asked. Why, when ye allow a child to be circumcised on the Sabbath, "are ye angry with me, because I have restored soundness to the whole body of a man on the Sabbath?" ‡

We cannot doubt that Jesus meant to convey some very important instruction in actions which form so prominent a part of his ministry. It could not have been for any light purpose that he thus repeatedly put his life in jeopardy. Supposing the representations relating to the Sabbath contained in the Pentateuch to be correct, our Saviour would not have pursued the course which he did merely for the sake of correcting the over-scrupulous notions of some of the more bigoted Jews concerning its observance. The end would have been too trifling, and too little connected with any high moral and religious object, to be aimed at by means so hazardous. Nor, supposing those representations of it correct, would it have been easy for the wisest and most liberal-minded of the Jews to draw a line between the

* John v. 1 - 16.

† John vii. 1.

‡ John vii. 19 - 23.

scrupulous observance of the day, which was so solemnly required, and the over-scrupulous observance of it, which, after all, was simply not required. Taking another view of the subject, if the ritual Law were ordained by God, we cannot believe that our Lord meant, by these actions, indirectly and tacitly to repeal it. A law so solemnly promulgated by God could not be indirectly and tacitly repealed. There is but one other purpose which can be ascribed to his actions. It is, that they were intended, at any risk which the purposes of his mission allowed, to indicate that that Law was not ordained by God, but was a system of human superstition.

WE must not refine in drawing inferences from the words of Jesus, as if they were those of a philosophical treatise, written with great precision, and were not popular language, addressed to rude, unenlightened hearers, with strong prejudices, and incapable of any accurate exercise of intellect. We must regard their essential meaning, and consider the effect obviously intended. But the words used by him at the Feast of Tabernacles, in reference to the facts just mentioned, have a bearing not obvious, perhaps, at first sight, but which, without any violation of the principles just laid down, we cannot well doubt, was purposed by our Lord. They have been partly quoted already.

“Did not Moses give you the Law, and yet no one of you regards the Law? Why do you seek to kill me? The crowd answered him: Thou art mad; who seeks to kill thee? Jesus replied to them: I have done one work at which ye all are astounded. Moses gave you circumcision, — not that it comes from Moses, but from the fathers, — and ye circumcise a child on the Sabbath. If a child be

circumcised on the Sabbath, that the Law of Moses may not be broken,* are ye angry with me for restoring soundness to the whole body of a man on the Sabbath? Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteously."†

Considering the manner in which circumcision is represented in the Pentateuch as having been ordained and enforced, there is something well deserving attention in the words in which our Lord first refers it to Moses, and then to the fathers, as if it were, at most, a mere ordinance of Moses, or a traditionary rite of the Jews, sanctioned by him. He does not speak of it as appointed by God. "If a child," he proceeds, "be circumcised on the Sabbath, that the Law of *Moses* may not be broken, are ye angry with *me*" for what I have done? The word "*me*" is here emphatic. The sentence is antithetical. The question belongs to the class of those passages in which our Saviour demanded for himself deference like that, or greater than that, which the Jews had been accustomed to pay to those whom they most honored under their old dispensation; as when he said, "A greater than Solomon is here"; — "Before Abraham existed I was He"; — "Have ye not read what David did?" But, if we follow the Pentateuch in referring the rite mentioned, not to Moses, but to God, as its proper author, the language becomes altogether unsuitable. We shall, at once, perceive this by substituting for "the Law of Moses" an expression corresponding to that conception: "If a child be circumcised on the Sabbath, that the *Law of God* may not be broken, are ye

* As a child, according to the Law, was to be circumcised on the eighth day after its birth, the rite was performed on the Sabbath, if that happened to be the eighth day.

† John vii. 19-24.

angry with me ? ” — “ Are ye angry with me,” our Saviour goes on, “ for restoring soundness to the whole body of a man ? ” In these words, the antithesis between the act which he had performed and the act performed in circumcision represents the latter, not as a sacred and most important rite, but as a mere mutilation of the body.

THE ordinances concerning clean and unclean food form a prominent feature of the ceremonial Law.* The animals enumerated as unclean were to be an abomination to the Israelites. The touch of their dead bodies was pollution. It rendered even inanimate things unclean. The washing of men, and garments, and vessels, or the breaking of the latter, is enjoined in consequence of it. Minute and extraordinary directions are given concerning it.† The Jews were not to “ make themselves abominable ” by eating unclean food ; but it is said, “ Ye shall sanctify yourselves,” by abstaining from such food, “ and ye shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy.”

The Pharisees, in the time of our Saviour, attached a most superstitious importance to the washing of the hands before meals.‡ They regarded the food taken with unwashed hands as polluted. Our Saviour was, on one occasion, questioned by them on account of the neglect of this ceremony by his disciples.§ It is unnecessary to give the whole of his reply. He severely reprovcd them for

* Leviticus, Ch. ix. Deuteronomy, Ch. xiv.

† As, for example, “ If any part of such dead body fall upon any sort of seed to be sown, the seed shall be clean, unless, when it fell upon it, the seed had been put in water ; for then it shall be unclean to you.” Leviticus xi. 37, 38.

‡ See Wetstein's note on Matthew xv. 2.

§ Matthew, Ch. xv. Mark, Ch. vii.

teaching the commandments of men and making void the commandments of God ; with honoring God with their lips, while their hearts were far from him ; and then, turning from the Pharisees, and calling upon the multitude to attend, he said to them : —

“ Hear and understand ! Not that which enters the mouth pollutes a man, but what proceeds from the mouth ; it is that which pollutes a man.

“ Afterwards his disciples came to him, and said, Do you know that the Pharisees were scandalized, when they heard that speech ? But he answered them, Whatever my heavenly Father has not planted [whatever religious doctrine or system of doctrines] is to be rooted up. Leave them to themselves. They are blind leaders of the blind ; but when the blind lead the blind, it is to fall headlong. Then Peter said, Explain to us that dark saying ” ; — meaning the words that our Saviour addressed to the multitude. These words were so foreign from the conceptions which the Jews had derived from the Law, that the Apostles did not know how to understand them. “ And Jesus said, Are ye too still without discernment ? Do ye not understand that what enters the mouth passes into the stomach, and is cast out ? But what proceeds from the mouth has its source in the mind, and is that which pollutes a man. For in the mind is the source of evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false testimony, calumny. These are what pollute a man. But to eat with unwashed hands does not pollute a man.”

Perhaps the purpose of the last sentence, in which Jesus recurs to the original occasion of his discourse, was partially to veil from his disciples, as yet unprepared for such full instruction, the whole bearing of the truths he had declared, on the authority of the Levitical Law and the

Pentateuch. But their bearing is obvious. They are essential truths of religion. They were uttered by Jesus as a teacher from God ; and they show in what manner he regarded the representations of the Pentateuch concerning clean and unclean animals, and the pollution to be incurred by eating the one, and the holiness to be attained by eating only the other. The fact, that they are in direct opposition to the Levitical Law, is apparent ; but it may be made a little more striking to the imagination, if we will conceive of the astounding incongruity that would be produced, were the words of Jesus to be found in Leviticus or Deuteronomy, immediately after the ordinances respecting clean and unclean food.

CHRISTIANITY is distinguished by the indissoluble sanctity that it attaches to marriage ; — strikingly distinguished, when we consider the general licentiousness of principle, as well as practice, among Jews and Heathens, regarding the intercourse of the sexes, which prevailed before the coming of our Saviour. The sacred character with which marriage is invested by our religion is a necessary means of delivering men from the animal selfishness of the appetites, and of educating them as moral and spiritual beings. It transforms the passion of the sexes into a high and generous sentiment, that puts in action and invigorates whatever is noble in our nature. It makes it the foundation of the most intimate friendship. Though the sanctity of marriage has been but imperfectly regarded by Christians, yet its effects have been, to raise woman from the state to which she was degraded by the vices of the ancient world, and is still degraded wherever the influence of Christianity is unknown, and to establish her in her proper rank. It has placed the weaker and more refined portion of our

race on an equality with the stronger and ruder, and thus caused the purifying and civilizing influence of female virtue to be everywhere diffused. By making the union of parents indissoluble, it secures to their children care and love. It has infused a new vitality into the ties of natural affection; and these, in their numberless ramifications and interlacings, become the strongest bonds of civil society. It has created domestic life, the close union of individuals into families, the school in which our virtues are now formed in childhood, and the sphere in which our best charities are exercised in maturer years.

But the sanctity of marriage was not recognized in the Levitical Law. It presents in this respect a great contrast with the teaching of Christ. It countenanced the widest liberty of divorce on the part of the husband. If a wife "had not favor in the eyes of her husband, because he had found something offensive in her," he might "write her a bill of divorcement, and put it into her hands, and send her out of his house." * It was in direct opposition to this law (which is, obviously, from the mention of *writing* a bill of divorcement, of an age when writing had become common), that is, it was in direct opposition to the Levitical Law, that our Saviour thus taught: —

"It has been said, Let him who would put away his wife give her a writing of divorcement. But I say to you, Whoever puts away his wife, except for adultery, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries her who is put away commits adultery." †

In the time of our Saviour, the majority of the Jews inferred, as they were authorized to do, from the Levitical Law, that a man might divorce his wife for any cause of

* Deuteronomy xxiv. 1.

† Matthew v. 31, 32.

offence whatever. The Pharisees, who had, doubtless, heard something of his teaching respecting this subject, were desirous that it should be brought out in still more open opposition to the Law, that it might afford them an opportunity to excite against him the prejudices of the multitude. They, accordingly, came to question him on the subject, and made their inquiry with a show of deference. The Evangelist thus relates.

“ And the Pharisees came to ensnare him, and asked, May a man lawfully divorce his wife for whatever cause he will? And he answered them, Have ye not read, that the Creator, in the beginning, made a male and a female? And it is said, *For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother, and cleave to his wife; and they two shall be one.* So they are no longer two, but one. What, then, God has joined together, let none put asunder. They said to him, Why, then, has Moses ordained, that a man may give his wife a writing of divorcement, and put her away? He said to them, Moses, on account of your perversity, allowed you to put away your wives; but in the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, that whoever puts away his wife, except for adultery, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries her who has been put away commits adultery.” *

Here, again, our Saviour directly opposes his teaching to the Levitical Law; not, it should be observed, on the ground that that Law had proceeded from God, but that he was commissioned to revoke it; on the contrary, he declares the Law itself, in the particular in question, essentially bad, and contrary to the will of God. In the words, “ Moses, on account of your perversity, allowed you to put away

* Matthew xix. 3 - 9.

your wives," we are to consider the *essential* idea, which is, that the law had its occasion in the perversity of the Jews. The expression, "Moses allowed," is merely an adaptation of his language to the popular belief, concerning which any direct controversy would have defeated the purpose he had in view. But, while using this expression, Jesus, at the same time, affords decisive ground for concluding the belief to be erroneous. If the law respecting divorce proceeded from Moses, it proceeded from God. But a law cannot have proceeded from God, which is contrary to the will of God, and accommodated to human perversity; a law that counteracts the moral civilization of men, and indulges them in selfishness, sensuality, and domestic tyranny. It is to be recollected, that the code which contained this law likewise presented a broad contrast to Christianity in sanctioning polygamy and concubinage. How different the teaching of Jesus was from the notions which the Jews had derived from the Levitical Law, and the practice which they had founded upon it, appears from the remark of his own disciples, after his conversation with the Pharisees: "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry."

THE first mention by Jesus of the Jewish law respecting divorce is found in the Sermon on the Mount. In this discourse the manner is very striking in which precepts or principles derived from the Pentateuch are introduced to notice and remarked on by him, for the purpose of extending or contradicting them. His words are, — "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old" — "But I say to you." This is language which cannot be reconciled with the supposition, that Jesus held the common belief of his countrymen, that those precepts and principles proceeded

immediately from God. Introduce the expression of such a belief, and it would give a strange character to his words: "Ye have heard that God said to them of old" — "But I say to you." Had he intended to sanction the popular belief, and, at the same time, to signify that he was commissioned to enlarge or repeal the laws formerly given by God, we should find some other forms of introduction than those which he has used; as for example, "God spake by Moses to them of old, saying" — "But my Father now says to you."

THE argument we are considering has, perhaps, been sufficiently elucidated. But I will add one passage more. It is from the conversation of Jesus with the Samaritan woman whom he found by Jacob's well.* To her he openly professed himself the Messiah, contrary to the reserve which he was compelled to maintain with the Jews till the closing scenes of his ministry. To her, likewise, he spoke with more plainness in relation to the subject before us. She, believing him to be a prophet, questioned him at once respecting the fundamental point of difference between the Jews and Samaritans: Whether God should be worshipped on Mount Gerizim, or at Jerusalem. About the form of worship, which was essentially the same in the temple of the Samaritans and in that of the Jews, there was no question in her mind. But it is to this form of worship that the answer of Jesus relates. "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when ye shall worship the Father neither on this mountain nor at Jerusalem." I pass over a sentence unimportant to our purpose. "The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers of the Father

* John iv. 5-24.

shall worship him in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such worshippers. God is a spirit, and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth." This passage, viewed in the light in which it has been placed by the preceding inquiry, hardly requires any comment. Those who worshipped, either at Jerusalem or on Mount Gerizim, according to the rites of the Levitical Law, were not such worshippers as God desired. Their religion of ceremonies was not the religion of the heart. Their form of worship was to be done away, as unacceptable to God; and, in contradistinction to them, a new class of men was forming, through the ministry of Christ, who, rejecting all such rites, should worship God spiritually and truly.

WE conclude, then, that the tacit and indirect abolition of the ceremonial Law by Christianity, without any claim on the part of Jesus, that, though this Law was of divine origin, he was commissioned to repeal it; — the opposition between the spirit and character of our religion, and other portions of the Levitical Law; — and such words and acts of our Saviour as have been mentioned, bearing directly against that Law, — all prove that the popular notions of the Jews respecting its divine origin and authority, and, consequently, their notions respecting the authorship of the Pentateuch, were not sanctioned by him, but were opposed by him, as far as a wise regard to the accomplishment of the essential purposes of his ministry would permit.

WE will now pass from a consideration of the Pentateuch to some general remarks on the other books of the Old Testament.

SECTION VIII.

*On the other Books of the Old Testament besides those
of the Pentateuch.*

IN considering the other books of the Old Testament we must divest ourselves of the Jewish notion of their divine authority; or, in other words, we must divest ourselves of the belief, that the truth of all the facts which they relate, and of all the sentiments which their writers express, rests on the authority of God. When viewed under this aspect, they excite constant objections, and present constant occasions of scandal. But, when they are removed from the false light in which they have been placed, so that their true character may be discerned, we perceive them to be works of the greatest curiosity and interest, coming down to us from a remote antiquity; marking the history of our race with a long track of light, though broken and clouded, where all would be darkness without them; bearing, in their habitual reference to God, which gives them so peculiar a character, the impress of the divine dispensation in which they had their origin; and uttering, with the voice of far distant ages, sentiments of piety to which the heart of man still responds.

In regard to the *miscellaneous* books of the Old Testament, as they may be called, to distinguish them from the historical and prophetical, no further remarks seem necessary with reference to our present purpose. But, respecting the other historical books besides the Pentateuch, the inquiry arises:—In what manner should we regard

the many accounts of miracles contained in them, and the language which, to a modern reader, at first view, implies the frequent immediate interposition of the Deity in acting upon the minds of men and directing the order of events ?

In considering this question, a distinction is to be made among those books. In the Books of Joshua and of Judges, which relate to the period of several centuries, as is commonly supposed, immediately following the settlement of the Jews in Palestine, there is evidently, I conceive, a great mixture of fabulous traditions, such as are found in the early history of all other nations. With the Book of Samuel the history, to all appearance, assumes a more authentic character ; — far more authentic than that of the contemporary history of any other ancient nation ; and it continues to preserve a similar character through the Book of Kings. It is these Books of Samuel and of the Kings that particularly demand attention, in further considering the inquiry just presented.

We will first take notice of those forms of expression to be found in them which refer so much to the immediate agency of the Deity, though without supposing any thing properly miraculous, that is, any event not accordant with the ordinary course of nature, that may be recognized as such an event by man. In the occurrences of this world much, we believe, is left to the free agency of the moral beings who inhabit it ; while, on the other hand, religion and philosophy teach us that much is determined by the unseen operation of the controlling will of God. But to settle the limits of human and divine agency is a problem which no philosophy can solve. However convinced we may be that man possesses, as essential to all that is excellent in his nature, the power of doing good as his proper act, and con-

sequently the power of doing evil, we are wholly ignorant how far this power is limited and overruled by God's omnipotence. We believe, as the necessary groundwork of religion and morals, that God, though the ultimate, is not the immediate cause of all events; and that a wide distinction is to be made between what he directly ordains and what he permits. But this distinction was overlooked by the Jewish historians. Accustomed to the habitual contemplation of God as the author of all things, deeply penetrated by a sense of the marvellous circumstances under which their nation existed, and regarding it as the object of his special providence, they naturally referred *directly* to him whatever affected its condition, and whatever seemed to them a manifestation of his pleasure or displeasure. This state of mind they, of course, shared with their countrymen. We have scarcely entered on the Book of Samuel, before we find it related that "the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us to-day before the Philistines?"* The same mode of conception and style of narration appear throughout the history. To remark on one of the passages by which the early fathers were embarrassed, it is said that "an evil spirit from the Lord troubled Saul."† A modern historian might express the same event by saying that Saul became subject to temporary insanity. A religious man, if he wished to present the fact under a religious aspect, would now say that in the providence of God Saul was thus afflicted. The last mode of expression would differ from that used by the Jewish historian, not only in putting aside the agency of an evil spirit, but also in not *directly* referring the effect to God.

* 1 Samuel iv. 3.

† 1 Samuel xvi. 14.

It is to be kept in mind, that in all such language throughout the Jewish history we have only an expression of the conceptions of the writer. Of the counsels of God he could know nothing.

The next branch of the inquiry is, In what manner we are to regard the accounts of miracles contained in the Books of Samuel and of the Kings. The Book of Kings, as has been formerly remarked, was written, or compiled, after the commencement of the Babylonish Captivity. It begins with an account of the last days of David. Between the composition of the history and the first events related in it was an interval, therefore, of more than four centuries and a half. It has been supposed by many that the Book of Samuel was originally united with that of the Kings, as forming one work by the same author. But it seems to me most probable that they are different works by different authors, and I shall continue to speak of them as such. The Book of Samuel has been thought, from internal evidence, to have been written a considerable time after the conclusion of the series of historical events which it records, and these events extend through a period of about a hundred and fifty years.

In the Books of Samuel and of the Kings we find many accounts of supposed miracles, in the proper sense of the word. In regard to such accounts, we must recollect that we are wholly ignorant of the writer of either work; that, consequently, we know nothing concerning either writer to justify any peculiar confidence in his habits of investigation, his judgment, or his trustworthiness; that neither of them gave his testimony under personal circumstances that might tend to confirm it; that each of them wrote so long after many or most of the events which he narrates, that tradition might have done her common work in introducing

fables, and changing natural events into marvels; and that both of them lived in that stage of civilization in which men are prone to the belief of the supernatural, and among a people in whom this tendency had been especially strengthened. The miracles by which the dispensation of Moses was confirmed, whatever they were, must have been such as deeply to affect the imaginations of the Israelites. It is the necessary consequence of a miraculous dispensation to render men's minds familiar with the idea of the special manifestation of divine power, and to dispose them for a long time to acquiesce in the belief of supposed instances of such a manifestation. The case may naturally have been the same with the miracles of Moses, as it was with those of Christ and his Apostles. The former, as well as the latter, may have given occasion to many accounts of false miracles, such as we find in the works of the Christian fathers, particularly of the later fathers. There is nothing to render it probable that the writers of the Jewish nation were less likely to fall into error than those of the Christian church. While no one, who puts aside the notion of the divine authority of all the books of the ancient Hebrews, can doubt that extravagant fables and false prodigies are found in all those relating to that portion of their history which precedes the time of Samuel, while the whole history of the ancient world is full of pretended marvels, there seems no reason to except the Books of Samuel and of the Kings as free from this mixture. These views of the subject, it may seem, will justify us in rejecting altogether the accounts of miracles which they contain.

I think not. There is a different view to be taken. The considerations suggested will, undoubtedly, justify us in rejecting without hesitation all such accounts as clearly appear

to us to imply wrong conceptions of God, and in regarding others, of not so marked a character, with great skepticism. But those considerations have no bearing on another question that arises: Whether it were possible that the great end for which the Jews were preserved a separate people could have been accomplished, had there been no other miracles attesting the peculiar relation of that people to God than those which accompanied their separation by Moses. When we recollect that they were a small people surrounded by an idolatrous world, and often lapsing into idolatry themselves; when we recollect that we are looking back to a period of history when the idea of God, in its rudest form, was unknown to the generality of men, we may well doubt whether a succession of miracles was not necessary to preserve it among the Jews. But, were this the case, there is no presumption against their occurrence. On the contrary, we must believe that the necessary means were used by God to effect the purpose intended by him. I am reasoning throughout, as is apparent, without reference to that philosophy, as shallow, in my view, as it is irreligious, according to which God is bound by his own wisdom, or by some other necessity of his nature, not to manifest himself to men for any end whatever, except through those operations of his power which we call the laws of nature.

Believing, then, that God may have wrought miracles among the Israelites subsequently to the time of Moses, we shall find in their historical books some accounts which there seems little reason to question. Let us turn, for example, to the eighteenth chapter of the first book of Kings. Amid the general idolatry of the kingdom of Israel under Ahab, after the slaughter, by Jezebel, of the prophets of the Lord, Elijah appears from his retirement

to present himself before the king. "And when Ahab saw Elijah, he said, Art thou he who troubles Israel? And Elijah answered, I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, in forsaking the commandments of Jehovah and following false gods." The whole demeanour of the persecuted prophet corresponds to this fearless expression of high and unshrinking dignity. He demands an assembly of the people, before whom the many hundreds of the prophets of Baal and of the groves should meet him alone. In the presence of the assembled nation, he appeals to God for his decision:—"Jehovah! God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Hear me, Jehovah! hear me, that this people may know that thou Jehovah art God. Then the fire of Jehovah fell, and consumed the sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the earth, and licked up the water that was in the trench."

The credibility of this account is confirmed by the essential importance of the occasion on which this miracle is said to have been performed, when the religion of God was trampled down by a persecuting idolatry. It is confirmed by the extraordinary publicity asserted for it, as wrought in the presence of an assembled people, during a period of authentic history. But the noble presentation of moral grandeur in the situation and character of the prophet, and the transcendent magnificence of the description, vivid with all the marks of truth, are alone, perhaps, sufficient to create a presumption of the reality of the event, scarcely less strong than their immediate effect on the imagination and feelings. More, however, than all this, we have the most solemn attestation to the fact, that Elijah was a special messenger of God. In the Transfiguration of our Saviour, Elijah appeared in company with Moses, as associated with Jesus. Elijah, then, was a prophet of God; and, as a

prophet of God, his mission had been sealed by miracles ; and what miracle can we imagine more suited to his character, as a teacher and restorer of true religion among the idolatrous Israelites, than that described by the historian ?

These considerations, however, do not prove that all which is related concerning Elijah is to be received as it is told. I have before remarked, that the occurrence of real miracles has a tendency to give rise to false reports of miracles, and to procure credit for such stories. Counterfeit coin circulates with the true. It is a very striking proof of the authenticity and genuineness of the Gospels, that the intrinsic character of the narratives which they contain of the miracles performed by Jesus is such as to suggest no well-grounded doubt of the credibility of the writers. It is an equally striking evidence of the authority which these books obtained from the beginning, that they thoroughly checked the growth of all fabulous narratives of miracles as wrought by him during his ministry. It is only a confirmation of the force of this argument, that a crop of fabulous marvels relating to his infancy and childhood, of which some seed seems to have been early scattered, sprung up after the fourth century, and flourished during the dark ages. These fables are still to be found in the Gospels of the Infancy (so called), and other books of the same class, and some of them in the Koran.

In regard to the history of the Jews, I believe that the concerns of that nation, like those of all other nations and individuals, were under the special providence of God ; by which term, sometimes abused, — as what term of religion has not been ? — I mean an agency of God that is undiscernible by man in the particular instances of its operation, which is apart from, and, if I may so speak, lies behind, the ordinary concatenation of causes and effects, that alone

falls under our cognizance, and which veils it from our view ; but an agency by which the condition of God's creatures in this world is continually affected. Besides this special providence, we have seen what reasons there are for believing that miracles, subsequent to those of Moses, made a part of the Jewish dispensation. This fact is not only consistent with the supposition, that in the Jewish books of history there are many accounts of miracles not to be credited, but, considering all the circumstances under which those books were composed, it would naturally lead us, before examination, to anticipate that such would be the case. The conclusion, that in the Jewish histories there are many accounts of miracles not to be credited, has no bearing whatever on our religious faith, our morals, or our happiness, except one that is very important ; it relieves the mind from all the perplexity, confusion, and religious skepticism, produced by the inconsistency of those accounts with just conceptions of the Divinity.

After what has been said, it is, perhaps, scarcely necessary to observe that there is nothing in the character of the Jewish historians to qualify them to be guides in religion or morals. On these subjects they shared in the rude and erroneous notions of their countrymen, which were far in advance of those of the heathen world, but far behind those of an enlightened Christian. We are not called upon to adopt their moral judgments, expressed or implied, respecting characters or actions. Nor is it improbable, that they, or the earlier relaters whom they followed, were influenced in their representations by personal or party prejudices. These remarks may seem to some too obvious to be thus formally stated ; but we are not a century removed from the time when the credibility of revelation was thought to be involved in the proof that David

was a man *after God's own heart*, because the anonymous author of the Book of Samuel represents Samuel as using this expression concerning him.

WE pass to the prophetical books. The prophets were the public religious teachers of the Jews. This was their distinguishing characteristic. The true prophets conscientiously addressed their countrymen as ministers of God. It was their business to instruct, warn, threaten, exhort, and encourage the people.

These were the true prophets ; but the name " prophet " was equally extended to those who dishonestly, and with bad purposes, assumed the character of teachers of the national religion. Thus we find mention of false prophets as well as true. It was given to those also who taught the worship of idols ; as we read, for instance, of the prophets of Baal. The leading idea to be formed of a prophet is that of a public religious teacher, whether honest or dishonest, whether the professed minister of the true God or of some false god. In our own language the word " prophet " is now restricted to denoting, in its proper sense, one miraculously commissioned to foretell events. It is too late to change the name as applied to the Jewish teachers ; but if we would avoid error, we must give it the additional meaning just explained. It would be a great extravagance to suppose that all those called prophets in the Old Testament were regarded as possessing the miraculous power of foretelling events, or as making pretensions to this power.

The prophets whose writings remain, in addressing the Jewish people, often insisted on the certain or probable consequences of their sins ; on impending dangers, which could be avoided only, if at all, by a return to their duty ; on the blessings which would follow reformation and goodness ; on

the mercy of God as about to be displayed in some approaching deliverance ; and on that constant faith which the Jews, as his chosen people, might repose on his providence, if obedient to his will. It is the office of every teacher of religion and virtue to look to the future, and to point out the consequences of conduct. The imaginations of the prophets were strongly affected by a sense of the connection of the Jewish nation with God. They described this connection in the strongest terms. They spoke of the nation in a figure hardly agreeable to our ears, when we suffer the mind to dwell upon it, as *God's inheritance*, or peculiar possession. Viewing it as existing through its past and anticipated history, they personified it as Israel, *his servant, his son, the child whom he had loved*, who might be chastised for the sins of a particular generation, but whose enemies and oppressors were to be destroyed, and for whom a future glory, as yet unknown, was in reserve. Thus their writings often assumed the form of prediction. The prophets, also, as ministers of God, were accustomed, with the licensed boldness of Oriental poetry, to introduce God as through themselves addressing the people, and to represent their declarations of what they believed conformable to his will and purposes as immediately suggested by him. Their language in these respects, though different in the turn of expression, was the same, in meaning and effect, with that which has been uttered from Christian pulpits down to our own time, and that which every religious and moral teacher may or must use when he believes himself to be stating what is indisputably the law of God.

It is clear that there is much in the language, conceptions, and sentiments of the authors of the prophetic books (so called) which is not to be referred directly to God ; and, so far as we have proceeded in our remarks on

them, we may proceed with assurance. But there are good reasons for entertaining the question, Whether some of their number were not occasionally employed as ministers of God, under his immediate direction, and endued with the power of predicting events directly revealed to them by him. In the supposition that they were so there is nothing intrinsically incredible ; and such may have been the fact, even though no conclusive evidence of it now remain. We cannot expect to be able to ascertain all that has taken place in the extraordinary, any more than in the ordinary, manifestations of God. But the question, as regards our own belief, is simply, Whether we have sufficient evidence of the truth of this supposition, or whether the balance of probabilities inclines for or against it. In the opinion which has commonly prevailed relating to this subject, much has been assumed without proof ; there has been a great want of critical inquiry, and of logical and well-grounded reasoning. On the other hand, the opinion directly opposed to it has been rested chiefly on a principle destructive of any belief in revelation, and of any religious sentiment toward God as a personal being, or rather of any belief in the God of Christianity ; I mean, the principle that rejects all extraordinary interpositions of God, and regards the power that governs the universe as capable only of a sort of mechanical action ; — God and matter being equally controlled by certain inevitable laws, the Laws of Nature.

The subject deserves a much more thorough and judicious examination than it has received ; an examination to be carried through successfully only by one who unites the qualifications of a true Christian philosopher, a wide thinker, an able reasoner, an enlightened critic, and a laborious and accurate scholar. Its result might, perhaps, attain a high degree of probability. It might at least present us

with all that can now be known on the subject. But, in the mean time, if our opinions must remain more or less uncertain, it is an uncertainty that in no way affects our virtue or happiness.

THE direct evidences of the divine authority of our religion have been divided into miracles and prophecies. But it is obvious that a prophecy is only a miracle of a particular kind, and that, however clear and satisfactory, it can carry with it no peculiar proof, different from that afforded by any other miracle. In order that a prophecy may be received as evidence, its supernatural character must be unquestionable. There must be no doubt respecting either its meaning, or its correspondence with the event predicted, or its intended reference to that event. There must be no mode of accounting for the correspondence between the prophecy and the event, except by referring the former to the omniscience of God. These conditions are not, as I conceive, fulfilled by those passages of the Old Testament which have been alleged as prophecies of Jesus. Before the coming of our Lord, the Jews, interpreting the Old Testament allegorically, had applied many passages in it to their expected Messiah. The disciples of Jesus retained more or less of the common notions of their countrymen respecting this subject; and we accordingly find some of those passages, or others interpreted in a similar manner, applied to him in the New Testament, particularly in the Gospel of Matthew, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistle to the Hebrews. In what is reported concerning the conversations of our Saviour, there are expressions that require explanation; * but he never appeals, in evidence of

* I have formerly adverted to this subject in an article published in "The Christian Examiner," Vol. V., for 1828, pp. 53-59.

his divine mission, to any words of a Jewish prophet, as containing a miraculous prediction.

The writers of the prophetical books undoubtedly believed that the series of God's dispensations to their nation was not completed ; that something greater was in reserve for it ; that all the marvellous preparation which had been made was to produce other results than what had yet taken place. This belief gathered strength in after times. The chosen people, harassed and subjugated, could not but look forward to some miraculous interposition, by which God would at last manifest his purposes toward them and toward the world. They were expecting the appearance of that great minister by whom those purposes would be accomplished, — the Anointed One, the Messiah. This messenger came. The object of his coming was unlike what they had anticipated ; the kingdom which he was to establish was not that which they had looked for ; the results, as regarded their own nation, were altogether different. But he was the long-expected Messiah, the Anointed One of God. He had come to fulfil the purpose of the Jewish dispensation. Our Saviour accomplished not any express prophecy relating to him, but he came in conformity to an expectation which the whole tenor of God's providence toward their nation had taught the Jews to entertain.

THE main purpose of these remarks on the books treated of in this Section, as well as of those on the Pentateuch, has been to show, that these writings, when their character is properly understood, afford no ground of objection to the Jewish or Christian dispensation. But the subject suggests some other reflections, to which we will attend in the next Section.

SECTION IX.

Concluding Remarks.

IN one of the most popular of the works introductory to the books of the Old Testament, written by a late prelate of the Church of England, they are spoken of as forming "that consecrated canon, in which the holy oracles were preserved by the Jews, which was stamped as infallible by the testimony of Christ and his apostles, and which, in the first and purest ages of the Church, was revered (together with the inspired books of the New Testament) as the only source of revealed wisdom."*

Such, in conformity with the creeds of different churches and sects, has been the language of many theologians respecting the Old Testament. They have represented it as having proceeded miraculously from God himself, the human writers being agents of the Divine Mind, in the same manner as a divine origin has been ascribed by the Hindus to their Vedas and other sacred books, by the Mahometans to the Koran, and by the Parsees to the Zend-Avesta. They have, in consequence, received the accounts, given in its different books, of the Deity, of his acts, and of his communications to the Israelites, as constituting a revelation which he has made of his character. They have regarded the moral judgments which those writings express or imply as conformed to the highest standard of benevolence and justice, and as affording the most authoritative directions for our own conduct. And they have viewed all the events

* Gray's Key to the Old Testament, Preface.

related, however legendary some of them may appear, as not only possible, but certain ; and, so far as they pretend to a supernatural character, as altogether worthy of God. At the same time, they have rejected those expedients by which the early catholic Christians modified their belief, and attempted to reconcile it with the actual character of the books of the Old Testament.

When we compare the modern unqualified doctrine concerning those books with that more complex one held by the generality of the early Christians, on the one hand, or with the opinion of the Gnostics, on the other, it is not easy to say which of the three is most irrational. We marvel at ancient errors ; for our wonder has not been deadened by familiarity ; but false doctrines prevail in our own time, which, if we were a little farther removed from their sphere, would appear to us not less amazing. The history of opinions concerning religion comprehends the whole history of the most portentous absurdities and the most pernicious errors into which mankind have fallen. In the history of Christian theology we find these errors and absurdities clustering round the essential truths of religion, concealing them from view, and counteracting and annihilating their influence. We cannot here inquire into all the causes which have produced this state of things ; but we may observe, that one occasion of the prevalence of error, and of the obstinacy with which it has been maintained, is to be found in the essential character of religion itself.

The truths of religion relate to our spiritual nature, to the government of God, to the unseen world, to eternity, to the Infinite Being. Now these are all subjects which, in many of their aspects and relations, not only lie beyond the limits of our knowledge, but transcend our power of

comprehension. We cannot, for instance, grasp the idea of infinity; we can only conceive of it negatively, as the absence of all limitation. Of propositions concerning it, directly contradictory, we can neither affirm nor deny one or the other. — Who will say that created things may or may not have existed from eternity? Who will affirm that creation does not imply a commencement of existence? Who will maintain that the power of creation has not always been an attribute of the Deity, and may not from eternity have been exercised by him? — Who will say that the universe does or does not exist within circumscribed limits, surrounded on all sides by an infinite expanse of void space? Who will contend, on the one hand, that things finite and bounded in their nature must not lie within definite bounds; or, on the other hand, that there are definite bounds beyond which God has not manifested, and cannot manifest, his power and goodness? — Who will imagine that to the Eternal Being there is any past or future; that he is older to-day than he was yesterday? Who will affirm even the possibility of our conceiving how there should not be? — Who can comprehend how the Unchangeable should be continually varying his operations, to produce the infinite succession of changes throughout his illimitable works? Who can comprehend how all these changes should be merely the counterpart of changes, I do not say in his will, but in his volitions and the exercise of his powers? * But who that regards him as the source

* The immutability of God has been made an objection to his having miraculously revealed himself to men; the supposition that he has done so being regarded as implying some change in the Infinite Being. But this objection has proceeded from a very narrow view of the subject. God's immutability is no more opposed to the belief of

of all finite existence can form any different conception of his agency ?

his having thus revealed himself, than it is to the fact of his unintermitted infinite agency in his ever-varying operations throughout the physical and moral universe. It is assumed in this objection that the works of the Unchangeable Being must be unchangeable.

The same attribute of God has also been made an objection to the efficacy of prayer, as distinguished in its results from religious meditation, or, in other words, as being the means of obtaining any blessing *directly* from God. He who cannot change, it is said, will not be changed by our prayers. But here, again, is a great oversight. It might be said with equal truth, or rather, it would be said with equal error, that he who cannot change will not be changed by any exertions of ours ; that, while all we receive is from him, it is a mistake to believe, that, on account of any efforts we can make, he will grant us any thing more of happiness, or knowledge, or virtue, or even of the pleasures or the necessities of this life.

THE train of thought we have been pursuing suggests another consideration.

In those theories respecting the material universe in which the being and agency of God are either directly denied or indirectly excluded, nothing can be intelligibly represented as the cause of all that exists but matter, and material, that is mechanical, forces. These must be supposed to have existed for ever. But of the agency of such forces we can have no conception, except that they produce motion either in the body in which they inhere, or in some other body. When, therefore, we have excluded the power and intellect of God from the creation and government of the universe, we have nothing left but matter and motion to supply their place. But mechanical forces cannot change their mode of operation. Those forces which are the supposed agents in the formation of the universe must have acted from eternity as they now act, ever producing the same unvarying effects. All that exists must, therefore, have for ever been in a state of equilibrium and rest, or of regular, unchangeable motion. Thus, when we put aside every other consideration, when we confine ourselves to this single point of view, and when we grant to the dis-

In attempting to answer consistently questions concerning subjects like these, our reason finds a barrier which it cannot pass. Nor are these the only, nor are they the most interesting, class of questions respecting the objects of religion, which require for their solution other knowledge, or other powers, than what we possess. The consideration of such questions may teach us that it is an important part of our wisdom "to know how little can be known"; to

"Wait the great teacher, Death, and God adore."

To a being of a higher order how incongruous must it appear, that man, — a creature just formed; but a short while ago a helpless infant, or an ignorant child; whose imperfect faculties are the growth of a few years; whose understanding is so liable to be deceived by the errors of others, and perverted by the meaner part of his own nature; who so often errs in judgment concerning the objects immediately around him; whose knowledge of the Creation, its past history through illimitable time, and its inexhaustible modes of being through illimitable space, is that of a stranger just introduced into it, just learning its language, and confined to a circuit of a few miles, — that man, so very ignorant and incapable, should undertake to solve the problem of the Universe, and to discuss, as if the subject lay all within his comprehension, the character, counsels, and works of the Infinite Being. The essential

believer in God's agency all that he may imagine and assume, he is able to construct out of his materials, not such a universe as exists, but only a universe of perpetual rest on the one part, and unvarying regular motions on the other, — an unchanging universe, not that of the Unchangeable, but Ever-Acting Being, but that which must result from the unchanging, mechanical forces of matter.

truths of religion we know, for they have been taught us by God through Christ, and this knowledge is of inestimable value; but beyond and around them is a region into which we cannot penetrate. Yet this region men have attempted to explore, and have returned from it with their reason so baffled and confounded, as to be incapable of discerning the real character of familiar objects, and comprehending the true meaning of words. In this state of mind they have come to the examination of subjects, related to their faith, of which the human understanding is fully cognizant. Finding that in the nature of things there were problems connected with religion which they could not solve, they have been ready to acquiesce in verbal or moral absurdities concerning it, the fictions of human folly, as if the latter were of the same character with the former. But true philosophy will teach us to keep in mind the limits of those powers which God has given us, equally in respect to what lies within our capacity, as what lies beyond it.

THE error that has been committed in representing the books of the Old Testament as of divine origin and authority, or, in other words, as constituting an essential part of a revelation from God, — which error, of course, involves the belief that it is a fundamental doctrine of religion so to regard those books, — has, beyond question, been a most serious hindrance to all rational belief of the fact that God has miraculously revealed himself to man, — the fact of incomparably the most interest in the history of our race. It is this fact which connects man with God, and the present life with the unseen and eternal. By introducing the supernatural into the natural world it unites them into one system, and changes the aspect of all things around us, spreading

ever them a light from Heaven. The immediate action of the Deity intervening in the course of human affairs has brought the proofs of religion fully within the scope of our comprehension and powers of reasoning. Every one may understand the evidences of Christianity. And it is the revelation that God has made of himself by Christianity which presents the overpowering and unfathomable idea of the Infinite Spirit under those aspects in which alone it may be comprehended by us. It brings God to our view in his relations to man as the Father of the Universe. To a Christian, religion is not a subject of "lawless and uncertain thoughts," bewildered in the mazes of speculation. Revelation has given fixedness to his conceptions of God, of immortality, and of responsibility. It has exhibited the objects of religion in their proper relation to the things of this life, and invested them with their true character, as the most solemn of realities; while without it the shadows of this world, as our years pass away, assume shapes more and more fearful.

It is on Christianity, as a miraculous revelation, that religion must rest as its principal and only safe support. If Jesus Christ spoke with authority from God, attested by supernatural displays of God's power, we need look for no further evidence of all that is essential to our faith, — of all that is essential to our happiness as spiritual and immortal beings. But if we reject Christianity, we cannot fall back even on the uncertainty which preceded it in the Pagan world; for this uncertainty is rendered darker and more gloomy by the supposition that God (or the Power, whatever it may be, that acts throughout the Universe) has left the most enlightened portion of mankind to found their religious hopes on a delusion, and by the consequent distrust, which must necessarily be produced, in all the efforts of

man's reason to attain any satisfactory conclusions respecting the objects of religion.

It is to Christianity, then, that we must look as the main source of human improvement and happiness. It is in her cause that the battle between good and evil is to be fought. But, in order that we may successfully maintain our religion, we must have a clear conception of what it is, and of what it is not. Pure Christianity is pure religion and pure morality; but what characterizes it as Christianity is, that it rests the evidence of the truths essential to the virtue and happiness of man on the attestation of God; and that in the very fact which it supposes of his miraculous interposition,—that in this fact alone, it affords a most glorious exemplification and proof of the truths which it teaches concerning his paternal character, and his purposes toward us. But, under the much abused name of Christianity, superstition has sheltered great errors, doctrines alien from its spirit, contradictory to its essential truths, revolting to reason, and even doctrines utterly outraging justice and humanity,—the doctrines of religious tyranny and persecution. Many of these errors, embodied in the creeds of churches and sects, and in the decrees of councils, still burden the Christian world. It is to their public renunciation, however distant the period of it may be, that we must look for any great improvement in the moral and religious condition of men. Then the force of the evidences of our faith may be far more widely recognized, and its proper influence, uncounteracted by those errors, may be far more generally felt. But, in the mean time, there is for every one a consideration which even more intimately concerns him. The more correct are his own conceptions of Christianity, and the more strong is his

own conviction of its truth, the greater power will it have to elevate his character; to enable him to live wisely and honorably, and, if no severe trials be appointed him, happily; to make him useful to those he loves, and to all whom he may serve; and to prepare him for that higher state of being, of which Christianity alone can give him any assurance.

END OF VOL. II.



